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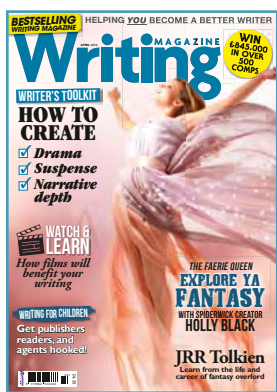
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Welcome...

Dear Reader

I hope you've already spotted the jam-packed Competition Special that comes with this issue, overflowing with opportunities for you to venture into new literary territory, so I won't go on about that here. In *WM* itself this month, we're overhauling the kitbox, to make sure your writer's tools are in good shape, and you know how to use them. We've got practical advice on story structure and how to use subplots to give your novel narrative depth; creating suspense and chills in scary stories; generating drama in your fiction; enhancing your descriptions by using all the senses, with food as the mouthwatering recipe, and how to hook agents, editors and readers with your children's books. And beyond the text, we're keeping your writing life in order, with challenging thoughts about how deeply you need to care about your topic to write well, encouragement to widen your professional circle and fight the urge to fly solo, advice on broadening your work possibilities as a literary freelance, and what you need to know to keep the taxman at bay. In short, everything you need to be inspired, fired up and ready to write. Now, how will you expend all that creative energy?



**TAP HERE
 TO WATCH
 A WELCOME FROM
 THE EDITOR**

Jonathan Telfer
 Editor



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DIANA KIMPTON

Diana Kimpton is the author of *Plots and Plotting: How to create stories that work* - the first in her series of books for writers. She writes for children and adults and has had more than forty books published, including her successful Pony-Mad Princess series. Several of her animation scripts have been produced for TV, and many of her books have been translated into other languages. Find out more about her at www.dianakimpton.co.uk



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FIONNUALA KEARNEY

Fionnuala Kearney lives in Ascot with her husband. They have two grown-up daughters (both with deliberately simple monosyllabic names). One of seven children, Fionnuala likes to write about the nuances and subtle layers of human relationships, peeling them away to see what's really going on beneath. *The Book of Love* is her third novel; her first was the Top Ten *Irish Times* bestselling *You, Me and Other People*. Find her at www.fionnualakearney.com



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RACHEL BURGE

Rachel Burge works as a freelance feature writer and has written for a variety of websites, including BBC Worldwide, Cosmo and MTV. She lives in East Sussex with her partner, son and black labrador. She is fascinated by Norse mythology and swears she once saw a ghost. Her debut novel, *The Twisted Tree*, is a YA thriller set in the remote snows of Norway, out now from Hot Key Books. Find out more at www.rachelburgewriter.co.uk

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THE WORLD OF WRITING

Advice from the best, inspiration everywhere and new ways to win – tips and trivia from the wide world of writing, curated by **Derek Hudson**

Salinger's secret writing to be revealed



The *Guardian*'s Alison Flood picked up an exclusive which revealed that JD Salinger's unseen writings are going to be published.

'JD Salinger's son (Matt) has confirmed for the first time that the late author of *The Catcher in the Rye* wrote a significant amount of work that has never been seen, and that he and his father's widow are "going as fast as we freaking can" to get it ready for publication.'

Alison Flood reported that Salinger, who died in 2010, had left behind 'a small but perfectly formed body of published work that has not been added to since 1965's New Yorker story, *Hapworth 16, 1924*. Rumours have circulated for years that the creator of

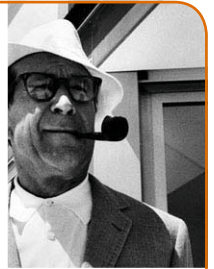
one of the 20th century's most enduring characters, Holden Caulfield, continued to write over the ensuing decades he spent in the New Hampshire village of Cornish, far from public view.'

In the *Guardian* story, Matt Salinger was quoted as saying his father 'teemed with ideas and thoughts ... he'd be driving the car and he'd pull over to write something and laugh to himself – sometimes he'd read it to me, sometimes he wouldn't – and next to every chair he had a notebook.'

'He just decided that the best thing for his writing was not to have a lot of interactions with people, literary types in particular. He didn't want to be playing in those poker games, he wanted to, as he would encourage every would-be writer to do, you know, stew in your own juices.'



Sharp practice



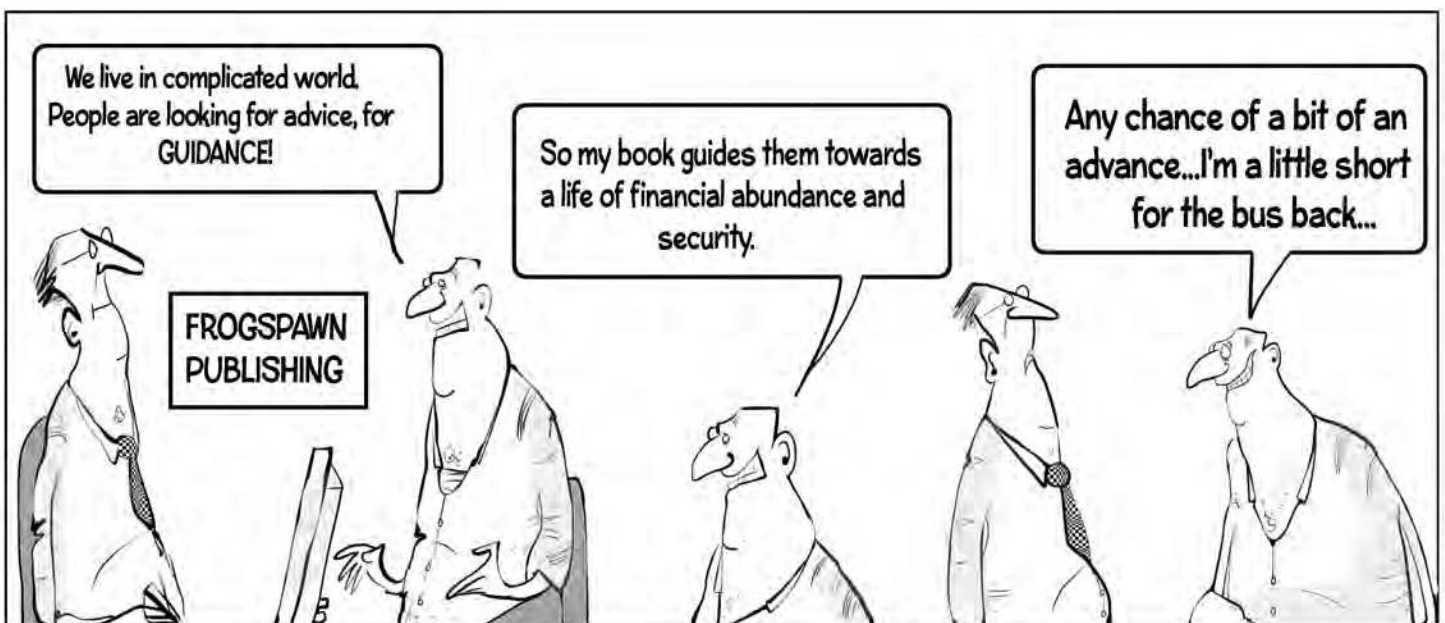
Anecdotes on the Uvadahlia blog include a story of the pencil sharpening routines of Georges Simenon (1903-1989), a Belgian French-speaking writer and the author of numerous novels, 'especially known for inventing the character of the French police commissioner Jules Maigret' (<https://writ.rs/curious>).

Uvadahlia says he was one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century and could produce up to eighty pages a day.

'He was responsible for hundreds of novels and short stories, many of which were published under various pseudonyms. It is said that he decided to use the typewriter very late and that until then he used to get ready for work sharpening fifty pencils which he lined up on the desk, and if he happened to break the tip of a pencil, he changed it directly without waste of time.'

Elsewhere, Mental Floss noted that Alexander Dumas insisted that all of his literary output be colour-coded: 'Blue paper for fiction, pink paper for articles, and yellow paper for poetry.'

And: 'Virginia Woolf loved purple and wrote most of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in purple ink.'



Every writer needs a cat...

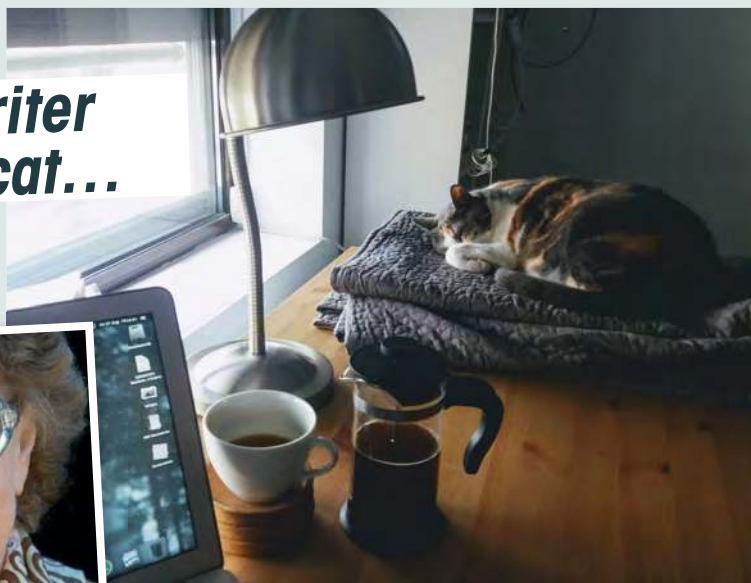


Muriel Spark once declared: 'If you want to concentrate deeply on some problem, and especially on some piece of writing or paper-work, you should acquire a cat.'

She explained that once alone with the cat in the room where you work... 'the cat will invariably get up on your desk and settle under the desk lamp. The light from a lamp... gives the cat great satisfaction. The cat will settle down and be serene, with a serenity that passes all

understanding. And the tranquillity of the cat will gradually come to affect you, sitting there at your desk, so that all the excitable qualities that impeded your concentration compose themselves and give your mind back the self-command it has lost. You need not watch the cat all the time. Its presence alone is enough. The effect of a cat on your concentration is remarkable, and very mysterious.'

Don't try this at home if you're allergic to cats.

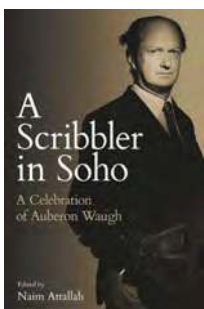


WILLIAM FAULKNER



'I'm a failed poet. Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't and then tries the short story which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing.'

The art of brutal whimsy



Lewis Jones, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, was adamant: 'Auberon Waugh was probably the wittiest journalist of his generation (he died in 2001, aged 61), and for all his personal amiability and courtesy, undoubtedly the rudest. His favoured mood was unbridled vituperation, leavened by brutal whimsy, and he invariably went too far.'

Lewis expressed his opinion in a review of *A Scribbler in Soho* edited by Naim Attallah, who appointed Waugh as editor of *Literary Review*.

He added that his 'great contribution in his *Private Eye* Diaries, which he rightly saw as his finest achievement, lay in his gleeful confusion of reality and fantasy'.

Waugh was sacked from *The Spectator* by Nigel Lawson for having altered the contents page so that the byline of George Gale read 'Lunchtime O'Gale'.

Naim Attallah, we're told, provides warm recollection of the old Academy Club, a relaxed establishment with some eccentric rules. Among them that 'shoes should be worn'.

'Poets were banned, as Waugh explained in one of his *Literary Review* editorials that take up nearly half of the book, because they were "vain, empty, conceited, dishonest, dirty, often flea-ridden and infected by venereal disease, greedy, parasitical, drunken, untruthful, arrogant... and also irresistibly attractive to women."

Sporting gobbledegook



Admiration for the outlandish words of football manager Colin Murphy, 75, of Derby County, Lincoln City, Stockport County, Southend United and Notts County, was expressed by *Yorkshire Post* sports writer Chris Waters.

He described how Murphy had been remembered for his programme notes that once saw him handed the Golden Bull Award by the Plain English Campaign, an honour for the worst and most confusing use of the English language.

Chris said, 'He delighted in penning some of the most outrageous gobbledegook ever committed to paper.'

Before one match he had opined: 'I realise that not many possess the wisdom of the Mandala, but at times persiflage is not comprehensible. However don't worry we will defeat the diphthongs.'

Also: 'However discombobulating we have been made to appear, we shall genuinely endeavour to discoidulate the cleavage.'

'We cannot fall into the trap of committing practical haplography.'

'As games go by, the mathematics change due to there being less games remaining.'

And 'As quickly as successive defeats plummet you from your objective, well, then, accordingly successive victories have the opposite perpendicular effect.'



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We want to hear your news and views on the writing world, your advice for fellow writers – and don't forget to tell us what you would like to see featured in a future issue...

Write to: Letters to the editor, *Writing Magazine*, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD; email: letters@writersnews.co.uk. (Include your name and address when emailing letters. Ensure all

letters, a maximum of 250 words, are exclusive to *Writing Magazine*. Letters may be edited.)

When referring to previous articles/letters, please state month of publication and page number.

★ STAR LETTER ★

Finding her niche

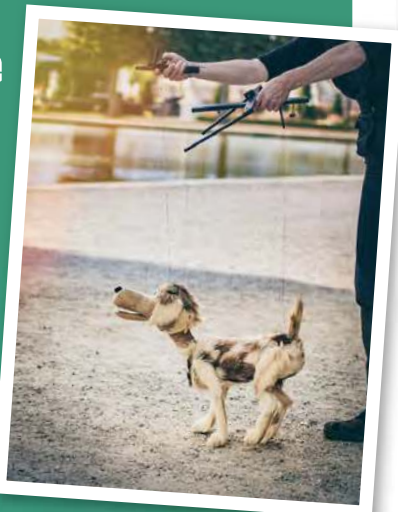
I am a writer. Not that I make a living out of it, few do, but I have had lots of articles published and four self-published books.

If I can anyone can. I'm dyslexic. I can't read my own writing and I do not have the gift of patience so necessary to writers.

I started writing seriously in the late 1960s and have turned out articles on all sorts of things ever since. It is more and more difficult to find magazines that are interested in general subjects, not just celebrities, food or beauty, although Patrick Forsyth, who belongs to the same writing group I do, says that I have a knack of finding obscure magazines to write for. I have sold two articles to a coin magazine and one on a puppet to a dog magazine.

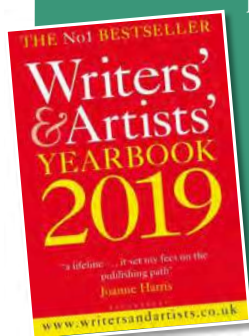
I am sending this by snail mail, not to prove I am a dinosaur although I probably am, but so that I make less mistakes.

M DERRIMAN
Braintree, Essex



The star letter each month earns a copy of the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2019*, courtesy of Bloomsbury.

www.writersandartists.co.uk



A flash of success

I'd always kept travel diaries and been a prolific reader but during an extended holiday an idea for a historical fiction novel of my own began to form. First draft finished, I decided maybe I had something so it was time to get serious. I enrolled at a creative writing class, progressed to a local writers' group and subscribed to *Writing Magazine*. As time passed the draft evolved as I learnt how to create characters, develop the story's arc, show not tell. Then the doubts began to creep in. I listened to others at the writing group, their well-crafted words flowing from the page, read the latest short story competition winners, scrutinised the books I was reading. Was my writing good enough? Would it interest anyone? Despondent, I thumbed through the latest *Writing Magazine* and noticed a request in the Flashes section for articles. Why not I thought, and submitted a four-line pitch to the email address. A few days later a reply arrived, with some guidelines, saying they would be interested. 900 words written I nervously hit the send button and waited. Expecting rejection, my confidence soared when the editor responded to say he loved the piece and accepted it in full. Maybe I can write after all. Now I'm back in full flow on the novel, faith and hope restored, but each month I head straight for the Flashes column. Well, we all have to start somewhere.

DENNIS ROBERTS
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

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Back on the write track

I have always followed my inclination to get thoughts and ideas on paper; from the earliest recollections of writing short stories at school, through to taking on a volunteer marketing role for church, sending in news items and reports to the local newspaper.

Although appealing, journalism did not become my chosen profession. Instead, I went into business management, and enjoyed the opportunities it afforded me to write reports, and even take and share minutes. Alongside these benefits though were the long hours, which I used as my excuse for not writing as much as I'd like to have done.

Now of course, the means of sharing ideas has changed, with the expected course being the posting of information on social media, not my idea of fun!

However, writing is still close to my heart, and so, and with more time available to me, I recently took out a subscription to *WM*. I now read the articles and enjoy the regular features every issue; and, most importantly, I have returned to writing something every day, yes – on paper. However small, and however poor it might be right now, I know I will improve.

NIC BERRY
Lincolnshire

The turning point

It's a strange thing how thoughts from the past come back to you – I had a very late start in writing seriously, and I think the turning point was when I got yet another dreaded rejection letter.

I said to myself, wait a minute, who the hell does he think he is, this editor. I'll show him.

And I did. Getting angry that he dared to reject me made me strong, and my next article was published in a national newspaper.

MOLLY SHAW
Crawley, West Sussex



I would like to thank you for publishing S Steel's letter (*WM*, March). I spent 40-odd years in the mining industry. I have never mined gold or diamonds for adornment but coal to heat people's houses, copper to carry electricity, even platinum for catalytic converters to treat exhaust gasses.

Stories? How can I justify working on that? I enjoy every part from idea to pressing send but how do they contribute to human advancement? I'm not like Dickens, writing to expose human injustice, most of what I write is escapism. Through S Steel's letter, however, I see that maybe my stories will help someone cope with trauma, may even help someone get through chemotherapy, and that makes it worth while.

SULLATOBER DALTON
Faringdon, Oxfordshire

'Call people disabled people not people with disabilities.'



I have to disagree very strongly with Brooke Winters on this (*WM* Mar, *Trash the Tropes*). I am Bella, I am a writer, with a full set of careers in the arts and garden design, and awards in all these. I am not, therefore, disabled.

I am a woman-on-wheels, I use a mobility scooter. I was diagnosed as having type 1 diabetes at the age of sixteen. I am on the bi-polar spectrum and have medication for several other disorders.

I spent my arts and garden design career working in the community, I tutor garden design students on accessibility, and ask them to consider the person first and ask them what they need/want to enjoy their garden. I started the website accessiblegardens.org which is now run by Mark Lane, a garden designer who uses a wheelchair, and I am an advocate for accessibility. To me, 'disabled parking' is a space that cannot be used, 'disabled toilet' is one which is not working. I can be used, I work. I have disabilities. I am not disabled.

BELLA D'ARCY REED
Maldon, Essex



GOOD GOOGLING!

I came across *Writing Magazine* by chance – a Google search. I am so glad Google brought up this result. I am delighted to have received my first copy recently. It opened up a new window into the writing world for me. As we know, writing can be such a solitary activity. I quickly made a cup of tea and perched on my writing chair to devour each page. It is great to read about the writing experiences of other people and I found out about competitions that I never knew were happening. I am a BAME writer and for me this has brought home knowledge about competitions and mentoring schemes that are on offer and how other writers have gone on to successfully publish their books. Thank you *Writing Magazine* for bringing the knowledge and excitement to my writing world. Waiting for my next copy with smiles.

MITAL KINDERKHEDIA
(by email)

PASSWORD PROTECTED

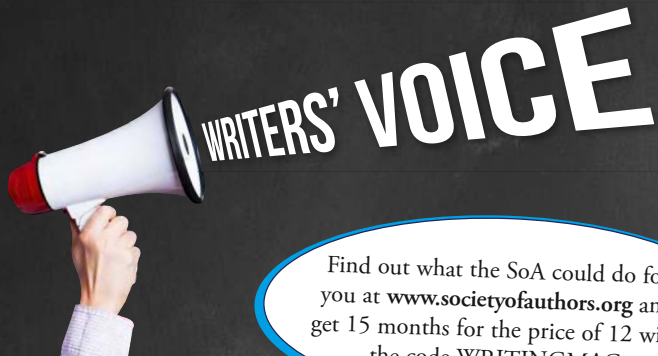
Today, I could easily have become the victim of a scam. A detective from Scotland Yard's Fraud division phoned me to say my bank cards had been cloned. They had arrested a young man claiming to be my grandson who said I had given him permission to use my cards. The police just wanted to check they hadn't been stolen. They hadn't. But they did want me to phone their fraud office, so they could check my accounts were okay.

I asked the name of the young man and where they had arrested him. I was told his name and they'd arrested him trying to use the cards in Argos to buy two TVs costing more than £1,000.

Thank goodness I am an avid reader of *Writing Magazine's* Behind the Tape section, so I know police procedure wouldn't allow him to tell me these details. Smelling a big fat rat, I put down the phone to call the real police. Sure enough, there has been a spate of similar calls recently and it's not his first time. How unimaginative can a criminal be? He tried the same scam in Sussex in 2015, using the same name for himself and the same story of the arrest.

Thank you, Lisa Cutts, for saving me. The real police have given me a password, so I'll know they're genuine when they come to interview me later. How cloak-and-daggerish is that! Worthy of a novel perhaps?

TONI MOUNT
Gravesend, Kent



LEARN TO LOVE NETWORKING

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Anna Ganley, head of staff at The Society of Authors, offers top tips for writers attending professional events



Are you the type of writer who is comfortable promoting your ideas, books and brand from behind a computer keyboard, but who lacks the confidence to navigate a room? Perhaps the word 'networking' fills you with dread, while others seem to throw themselves into a room full of strangers with ease.

The good news is that networking is a learnable skill – and for the potential unexpected and positive outcomes on your career, it's worth learning to do it well.

Here are a few practical tips to help overcome your fears.

Prepare

- Research the guest list – check for any familiar names you can look out for at the event.
- Plan your talking points – have questions ready to ask, such as 'How did you get started in...?' or 'What are you hoping to achieve from this event?' Write questions down and practice ahead of time.
- Consider what you want to share about yourself – asking consecutive questions without sharing personal information can start to feel like an interrogation.

If you're at an event with authors, agents or publishers, ask about their current project or seek out their recommendations for your next read. The key with conversation openers is to find a natural way in that suits you.

And keep in mind that you've got something in common with every person in the room: the event you're attending; the food and drink you're consuming; what's happening in the world today – a bit of light-hearted headline sharing is a great way to break the ice!

Find a buddy

You don't always have to go at it alone. At Society of Authors events we operate a buddy scheme, which can make large events much less intimidating. Find out if there's anyone you know going along and go with

them or take a friend. Chatting to people in pairs or small groups can be a comfort blanket when you're getting started.

Be that person

Don't dwell on how scary it is to start a conversation. Focus on the fact that by doing so you'll be helping other people feel more comfortable and at ease. Walking into a room full of unknown people can feel intimidating, so where you haven't seen the guest list in advance, try looking toward the outskirts of the room and find someone standing on their own. Maybe they don't know anyone either and they're hoping someone will come and talk to them.

Be present

Whatever you talk about, there's nothing more flattering than showing a genuine interest in what someone has to say. Ask what they do and why they're at the event, or just reach out your hand and say hello.

Try to listen more than you talk – hard to do when you're nervous, but you don't want to come across as pushy, especially if you're pitching your next writing project to an agent or publisher. As an attentive listener, you'll stand out as someone who values others.

Smile

If your body language is closed and cold, you'll signal that you wish to remain undisturbed. Even a slight change of posture can change the course of conversations. Smile, try to relax, and look as warm and casual as you can. It will encourage someone to walk up to you and start a conversation.

Introduce others

If you know a few faces in the room, asking someone if there's someone they'd like to meet gives you a role by introducing them. This is a handy trick as it allows you to join that conversation too, and it enables you to participate without being the centre of the conversation.

Challenge yourself

Challenge yourself to talk to at least three new people. This will give you confidence when you achieve this goal and spur you on to talk to others. It'll push you outside your comfort zone, but networking can have unexpected results – from a new contact to an idea for a story to a book deal. You may be surprised at the number of people you speak to once you get going.

Wrap it up and move on, professionally

It's easy to get stuck in a discussion with somebody out of fear of appearing rude. They may be very interesting, but the purpose of networking is to meet new people. A good rule is to talk to one person for 5-10 minutes and then move on to the rest of the room.

When the time comes to move on, if you're polite and respectful the person you're talking to will understand. You want to leave a positive lasting impression, so be sure to thank them and a genuine compliment never hurts either. Here are some things you could try:

- Plan a follow-up: exchange contact details and plan to stay in touch.
 - Shift the focus: tell the individual that you need to say hi to someone else. They will understand – they're there to network too.
 - Introduce someone else to the conversation: once they're chatting leave them to it.
- Wait for a natural pause in the conversation: use the opportunity to tell them how nice it was to meet them and move on.
- Make it benefit them: tell them that you don't want to hold them up so they can make the most of the event, too.
 - Get another drink/more food: you can always say you need to top-up or visit the loo!

And finally, practice

Go to events regularly to build your confidence. Learn how to open and close those professional conversations and grow your professional networks. The more you do it, the less challenging it will become and the more people you will know in the room anyway. www.writers-online.co.uk

On Writing

Tony Rossiter explores great words from great writers



“
‘What is written
without effort is in
general read without
pleasure’.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

It's a pretty obvious observation. It's usually easy enough to spot a piece of sloppy writing that has been dashed off without much effort. It may be unclear and difficult to follow, with lots of impenetrable subordinate clauses; there may be repetitions or superfluous phrases; or there may even be mistakes in construction, grammar or spelling.

No serious writer can be in any doubt about the effort that is needed to produce a decent piece of writing. Samuel Johnson was no slouch when it came to putting in the necessary effort. He spent nine years compiling his famous *Dictionary of the English Language*. Criticised by some as the work of 'a wretched etymologist', it was acclaimed by others as one of the greatest-ever achievements of scholarship by a single individual. Published in 1755, it was for many years the pre-eminent English dictionary – superseded only, 150 years later, by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Those who succeed in any walk of life often have no more talent or intelligence than their peers. What sets them apart, more often than not, is sheer energy and drive. When it comes to writing, those who succeed are usually those who are prepared to work hard and put in the effort. That effort needs to cover every aspect of the writing process – thinking, planning, researching, writing, editing, rewriting, submitting, promoting, etc. If, before you begin each writing session, you have a clear idea, either on paper or in your head, of what you will aim to produce in the session, that can focus the mind and help to ensure that you get maximum value from your efforts.

Professional writers are rarely satisfied with the first words they produce. The first draft of an article, a short story or a novel is just that – a first draft: something that needs to be worked on and improved. A willingness to put real effort into improving and rewriting their work is one of the things that distinguishes published writers from those for whom writing is simply something they do in their spare time for their own pleasure. Of course, there's nothing at all wrong with that; but if you want your work to be published, you'll need to edit and rewrite – and to put real effort into that. **WM**



From the OTHER SIDE OF THE DESK

The story of an unreliable narrator whose fantasising went beyond fiction shouldn't be transformed into a tale of privilege in publishing, argues agent **Piers Blofeld**

The world of publishing has been deliriously agog over the last week at the long demolition job in the *New Yorker Magazine* of Dan Mallory (<https://writ.rs/danmallory>), the real name of the *New York Times* number one bestseller AJ Finn (featured in *WM*, Apr 2018).

Mallory, who was brought over to work as an editor at Little Brown here in the UK, before returning to New York to work at William Morrow garnered himself a significant advance for his novel *The Woman in the Window* a year or two back. Even then the rumours were circulating and he now finds himself accused of being a serial liar and fantasist.

While there has been a predictable amount of head shaking at such reprehensible seeming behaviour and various attempts have been made to shoehorn Mallory's alleged behaviour into a narrative about white, male privilege, many people in publishing are secretly rather chuffed that our not very glamorous world has been getting a bit of the limelight.

The other great unsaid though is that while his behaviour may have been egregious, publishing certainly has its fair share – and given the nature of the business, one suspects more than its fair share – of dysfunctional professional behaviour.

There is an old political maxim that the smaller the stakes the more vicious the fight. If there is a nice big pie then people do not have to compete too ferociously for a decent slice of it and publishing has pretty much always been beset by the issue of having too many over-educated editors for too few even decently remunerated posts.

Add into that some really rather shocking treatment of older – and therefore more expensive – members of staff and you pretty much inevitably have an environment in which ability in office politics can all too often outweigh actual ability at the job.

Certainly the notion that Dan Mallory's supposed behaviour is a problem of masculinity seems pretty laughable to me. I have seen just as much bullying and dishonest behaviour from female colleagues as male. Ultimately my experience is that it is the way that power is framed that leads to abuse, not the identity of the person who wields it.

That underscores my concerns about far too much of the drive to diversity within the business, which is not just that it is a very handy sheepskin coat for some of the wolves of publishing, but more importantly – if it is to be more than a temporary fad – if the structure of publishing promotes abuses of power then changing the skin colour of a few of the people concerned will produce a change that is quite literally skin deep.

But the last laugh has to go to Dan Mallory. Whatever the truth or otherwise of the allegations against him, Jeffrey Archer is a definitive example of the fact that a whiff of sulphur does as much good as harm for a writer of thrillers.

If what people say about him is true then the normal trajectory for such pathological liars is that they run out of road and eventually friends, colleagues and lovers all start to connect the dots. What is so unusual about this case is that it seems as if Mallory not only wangled himself a big chunky publishing deal (although I'd be deeply sceptical of some of the figures quoted) but then went on to score himself a number one *New York Times* bestseller – something no amount of lies can get you and which now makes him just about untouchable.

If his behaviour is truly as it is reported, his success might be wildly unfair, but there is also something irresistibly comic about it. **WM**



Story is structure

Find out what prose writers can learn from screenplays with advice from novelist **Russel D McLean**

Act One: Setting the scene (or, why pantsing is inherently risky in storytelling)

Novelists often talk about being 'plotters' or 'pantsers' – ie those who write 'by the seat of their pants' with no forward planning. I have heard committed pantsers tell me that any form of planning beyond the most basic idea 'disrupts the integrity of the writing' and leads to a lack of spontaneity.

I recently took part in a course on screenwriting, designed to help those from other disciplines move across to the form, and some of these ideas became cemented in my head. Because screenwriting is always about compression of story, screenplays without structure can become unfocused and wieldy. While books are different to screenplays – there is more space to play with, different techniques that can be used to convey your story and get closer to the inner psychology of your characters – screenwriters talk far more about how story works than novelists, allowing them to create structures that allow them to focus on the techniques of storytelling, and the quality of dialogue, action etc.

You might think that pantsing leads to uniqueness, but the chances are you'll take a lot more time sorting your initial mistakes as you try to finesse your technique, and in the end, what you create will actually conform to a 'formula' of storytelling regardless.

So what can pantsing novelists learn from screenwriting structure? And can writing to a 'formula' really be freeing?

Act Two: Storytelling is storytelling (the common skeleton shared by all forms of storytelling)

Screenwriters and novelists both have the same goal: to tell a story that engages, moves and affects the audience. These stories will be about characters – people – with goals, motivations, wants, and needs. That divide you often hear about, where people talk about 'plot' novels or 'character' novels? It doesn't – and shouldn't – really exist. After all, there is only one story that anyone tells:

A character wants something and has difficulty getting it.

Ask yourself who your main character is, what they want and why they have difficulty getting it. And do that in one sentence (you'll note from the following example, it doesn't have to be an elegant sentence!). For example, in my last novel, *Ed's Dead*:

Jen, a young bookseller, wants a quiet life, but in trying to achieve this she accidentally kills her deadbeat boyfriend, and finds herself stuck with his stash of drugs and money.

Here, Jen the bookseller wants a quiet life, but encounters difficulty when the break up goes wrong and she accidentally kills Ed. We know who she is, what she wants and why

she has difficulty.

That single sentence becomes the setup and focus for the novel. Halfway through, we don't stop to detail Ed's background or switch to Jen's worried mother unless those details relate directly to Jen's journey.

In other words, Jen's initial want becomes the thing on which we hang all the other plot elements, giving the book focus and momentum, allowing the writer to focus on the bells and whistles that give the reader a unique series of events bundled within a structure that they can follow and intuitively understand.

We all know how stories work. We have grown up with them. We have been taught the basics since we were children. All stories have a beginning, middle and end (even if, in the telling, they are not necessarily experienced in that order), and all stories are about someone – a character, or set of characters who have to be active within a series of events.

The trick, then, is knowing how to sequence these series of events so that they have the maximum impact on the audience, or reader. Of knowing whose story we are telling (and whose point of view we are telling it from). And this is where we get down to the nuts and bolts of structure.

• Sequencing the plot

Now we have that throughline, focus

and momentum, what else do we need to do to make the story work? We need a template on which we can sketch the events of our drama. In the same way that we, as living beings, cannot exist without a skeleton to hold us together, so drama and stories cannot exist with a skeleton. And, just as you identify a human by the basic elements of its skeleton, so stories are identified by the essential shape of theirs. This is the underlying structure you need to construct your story and keep it focused.

Many screenwriters work to a three act, eight-sequence structure. These three acts are the basic building blocks of all stories that we've been taught since school: 1) The Beginning, 2) The Middle, and 3) The End. But within each act are sequences: discrete scenes or plot points that move us to the next section of the story.

Let's look at an example of the eight-sequence structure (you may hear variations, but the following is based on a workshop I attended, given by Pavel Jech, author of *The Seven Minute Screenplay*):

• **Act One (two sequences)**

- **Status Quo** – sets up your character and their world
- **Collision Course** – The thing that changes your protagonist's world.

• **Act two (four sequences)**

- **Rising Action** – protagonist attempts the easiest solution to their problem (of course, it doesn't work!)
- **First Culmination** – Next attempt to solve the problem, resulting in a twist or serious setback.
- **Buddy sequence** – A breather after the first culmination (in films it sets up a romance or has protagonist connecting with a friend)
- **Second Culmination** – a final, desperate attempt to solve the problem.

• **Act Three (two sequences)**

- **False resolution** – the character appears to reach a resolution. But either their real needs are not addressed or else this stands in opposition to--
- **True resolution** – The actual needs (rather than wants) of character are addressed, or the false resolution is in some way reversed.

Website: <https://namu.cz/the-seven-minute-screenplay>

At first, this may seem like a tick-box exercise. But many stories hit similar beats on an emotional and action level (break down the main narratives of your favourite novels and films, and you'll see that they more or less fit this framework, something David Howard shows with a number of well known movies in *The Tools of Screenwriting*). It's how the writer

presents these beats that makes the story unique, allowing them to experiment more with style, action and substance, safe in the knowledge that the story itself will not lose its focus.

One other thing worth noting is that some of you will have already realised that this essential structure can also be applied on a scene by scene, and sequence by sequence level.

Each scene works like a mini story. A character (or characters) will be driving the scene forward through their wants and needs, facing difficulty in achieving that goal. Much as if you write a story where a character wants something and simply has it handed to them, if you write a scene with no momentum or drama, then the reader will not want to progress.

By planning ahead and using the template above (or something similar – there are a number of variations to be found on this template, but many of them come back to the same essential shape) you will be able to focus upon crafting each scene with a similar level of care, thinking about the conflicts, needs, wants and outcome for your characters. Rather than thinking, 'How can I get myself out of this?' you will be able to focus on the details that make your story come to life.

But, I hear you ask, what if I find a more interesting thread while I'm working through the book? What if writing one scene changes a character's motivation or adjusts the action?

That's the beauty of using the skeleton – you can go back to your structure and re-sequence events according to this new information, sketching out the potential dramatic effects of this new line, and knowing in advance whether you're going to get into trouble. The structure and skeleton is not absolute – it is there as a guide; to help you see ahead, rather than groping blindly in the dark.

Act Three: Conclusions (why structure is not as mechanical as we expect)

Screenwriting may seem mechanical to those of us who came up through prose writing, but the truth is that often screenwriters talk about processes that are relevant and necessary to prose storytelling. We may work on a different scale, and with different practical tools, but

at heart, we are trying to achieve the same thing – to tell stories that communicate what is in our head to an audience looking for another view on the world. Using structure allows us to give common experience to this, to give readers the ability to connect with our ideas and be taken on a journey to new ideas and places. It isn't about making every story the same, but it is about using the common understanding of story to bring power and connection to our writing. **WM**

Further reading:

While some of these books are clearly focused on screenplays, their general discussions on storytelling structure are incredibly useful for novelists and prose writers in all genres:

• ***The Tools of Screenwriting*, David Howard and Edward Mabley**

A brilliant primer on story, and the second half of the book breaks down a number of movies to show the structure at work.

• ***Stealing Hollywood: Screenwriting Tricks for Authors*, Alexandra Sokoloff**

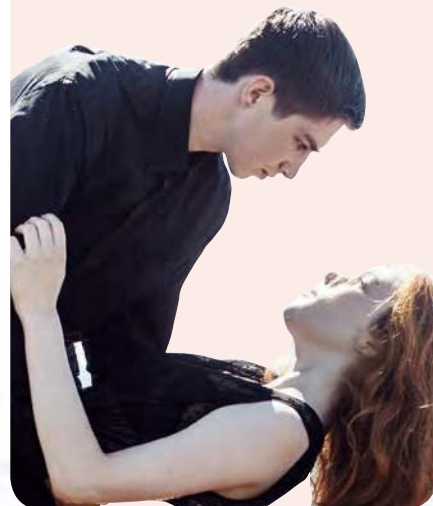
A bestselling novelist and a former Hollywood screenwriter, Sokoloff's book on adapting Hollywood techniques for prose is straightforward, inspiring and encouraging.

• ***Screenplay*, Syd Field**

A bible for many screenwriters. Field dissects the essentials of story (and also has a number of interesting anecdotes culled from decades in the movies business).

• ***Save The Cat! Writes a Novel*, Jessica Brody**

Jessica Brody takes the essentials of Blake Snyder's original, and hugely popular guide for screenwriters, reworking it specifically for novelists.





Nothing *personal*

Author **James McCreet** considers how much emotion writers need to write

I was once asked during a phone interview for a copywriting job why I was so passionate about industrial air filters. My response (unfiltered) was that I couldn't give a rat's jerkin about them.

I didn't get that job. But my point was pertinent. It's not the role of the professional writer to care about the subject. We seldom have any choice in the matter. Whether it's software, accountancy, law, medical prosthetics or electrical engineering, our job is to understand the detail sufficiently to write well for the target audience. Then it's on to the next job.

Certainly, it would be nice to care or even to be interested. But caring is a terrible trap in professional writing. If you can only write when you're interested, you're going to find yourself frustrated or blocked... and blocked writers don't get paid.

You might think that creative writing is different. It's surely not possible to write a novel or short story without being fully committed

to the piece, without really feeling the story or theme or character. I'm not so sure. I think it's worth considering the benefits of writing without feeling – only with craft.

Learning discipline

Something many professional writers will tell you – journalists, copywriters or novelists – is that 'being in the mood' is a luxury they can't afford. You get up and you go to work. If you're lucky, the 'mood' comes later. Often it doesn't. That's the difference between being a professional and an amateur. Or an artist – James Joyce took seventeen years to finish *Finnegan's Wake* only because others were paying his bills.

Any writer serious about making a living with words needs to produce commercially viable words every day. Most of the time, they will be words that are utterly vacuous (PR), subtly mendacious (marketing), flatly redundant (free advertorial material) or guaranteed never to be read. I've spent days adding extra 'content'

to websites just because a higher word count increases search-engine optimisation (SEO) scores. Nobody ever read the thousands of words.

Nevertheless, the ability to produce writing without emotion, to specified word counts and often to ridiculous deadlines (*The Times* once gave me an hour to write an article) is a skill every novelist can benefit from. It's what you rely on when you have no inspiration or when you're ill or when you've just had a row with your partner. You sit and you write without fail.

No block

I don't believe in writer's block. It usually translates as not being prepared, not having a process, or waiting for some nebulous sensation of being ready. Block is an emotional state. It's something you feel. It's highly personal.

If your writing has to be drawn from some profound Stygian well or heavenly vault, of course you're going to have problems occasionally. It's wilful delusion, however – as when you hear people



say, 'Oh, I need the stress!' or 'I can only write in a bothy forty miles from the nearest wifi router.' No. If you have the craft and you have the idea, you can write at any time, anywhere, and in virtually any conditions. It's just a case of concentration and practice.

Inevitably, there are richer, better and more successful writers than I who agonise over every page and produce a novel a decade. They are the exceptions. For every one of those, there are hundreds of thousands who produce nothing publishable.

Taking it personally

I recall the time when an article was handed to the office junior (a seventeen-year-old who might charitably be termed a half-wit) for their critical feedback. The feedback was neither coherent nor useful. That was earlier in my career and I was aggrieved to be second-guessed by an 'inferior'. I'm used to it now.

My job as a copywriter is to produce text that the client likes enough to pay for. Whether it's good copy in my opinion is entirely irrelevant. I have to learn what 'good' means to my employer. This means swallowing some pride. Better still, it means forgetting the concept of pride altogether. That's taking things personally.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for writers is handling negative feedback. It hurts because it can feel like a personal attack. It hurts even more when the feedback comes from a worse writer and is true. It hurts the most when it comes from an agent or publisher who is the final arbiter of whether your work is published. You can ride it out with bluff and ego or you can trust in your abilities and learn to discern which criticism actually helps.

It's difficult, but the best approach is to deal with the text, not the emotions. The text is all that exists for the reader. They don't see you sitting for hours at the keyboard, weeping or dead-eyed with despair. Nor do they care. They trust when they pick up your book that you have done your job and produced an enjoyable reading experience. The only emotion at

stake is the emotion they feel in response to the techniques you've put into play.

Rabbits from hats

We all know magic isn't real, but magicians exist nevertheless. They create a sense of wonder (or least perplexity) through their highly practised showmanship and sleight of hand. The lady vanishes. The audience applauds. That's writing, too.

The emotion the reader feels does not exist on the page. The page is just a screen or piece of paper marked with pixels or printed hieroglyphs. Emotion is an illusion created through a choice of vocabulary, a careful play of syntax, rhythm, grammar and punctuation. You can 'feel' all you want when you write, but the writing itself (and thus the reading) will have no feeling if you don't pull off the tricks of effective craft.

So the question is: why feel anything? Why make it personal when the feeling is essentially a trick? Learn how to perform magic and you'll always delight and surprise and please your audience. Magic doesn't exist; magicians do.

Finding the fun

So now the cynics (we also call ourselves 'realists') are wondering, 'What's the point of creative writing if it's emotionless, mechanical work? I write because I'm passionate about words and expression!'

It's important to differentiate between personalising the work and enjoying it. I love writing because I love the challenge of using a complex toolkit of techniques to express something highly specific for a particular readership. It's a challenge, but it's primarily a technical challenge. All of my passion is worth nothing without technique.

My pride in the work is the pride of a metalworker in his pair of surgical scissors. The person who uses those scissors will delight in their sharpness and precision while perceiving nothing of the forge, the hammer and the sharpening stone. Those are my pleasures. If I spend hours enjoying the process and yet produce a flawed item, my personal gain has been selfish.


Best of both worlds

A confession: I've actually poured the fullest extent of my hopes, dreams, pleasure and emotion into the ten novels I've written. I'm sure that's made them better books, and me a better writer. And yet I was unable to write a novel until my late thirties because I took the process too personally. It meant too much. It meant so much that not starting a novel was better than trying and failing.

What changed? I became a professional writer before I became a novelist. I learned to produce a set number of words to a strict deadline on subjects I didn't know and I learned to do this largely without emotion. I learned to interview someone by phone while people were shouting all around me on a train. I learned to write articles on arcane subjects ('The human rights implications of CCTV footage in personal injury cases') at a moment's notice and expect them to be read by people with decades more experience in the subject. I learned to take feedback from sweaty men with bad aftershave who'd never seen a semi-colon and agree that, yes, possibly a semi-colon wasn't a great sales tool.

All of my passion and wide reading and ethereal thoughts about art and the Nobel Prize had not made me a writer. My pride and education had not made me a writer. Writing had made me a writer.

Later, when I was ready to start a novel, I had the tools to succeed. Or rather, I had the most important tool. I wasn't going to extract my very heart and soul and lay them on the page. That would have made a bloody mess unintelligible to my readers. Instead, I would use the craft I'd learned to translate all of the emotion into lines that would evoke my feeling in the minds of the reader. Not my emotion, but theirs.

The reader seldom knows the writer personally. Why should they? Why would they? When the reader takes the words personally, that's good writing. 





THE FAERIE QUEEN

Spiderwick Chronicles creator Holly Black explains how she writes kick-ass 'real' fantasy, to **Tina Jackson**

With *The Folk of the Air* trilogy, Holly Black, bestselling children's

and YA author and reigning queen of Faerie, is firmly back in the intoxicating, sinister land she has made her own. Part two, *The Wicked King*, was published earlier this year, putting her kick-ass human heroine Jude into ever-more perilous situations as she tries to wield the power behind the faerie throne.

Holly is perhaps best-known for the faerie-set Spiderwick Chronicles, created with writer and illustrator Tony DiTerlizzi, but her first published novel, 2002's *Tithe*, was based in the world of faerie. 'I've been in faerie a long time,' says Holly down the phone from her home in New England. 'I've written other books, with vampires, magical monsters, but faerie is the thing that people think of with me and it fits with who I am.'

Wildly beautiful and fraught with danger, traps and pitfalls for the humans that try to navigate their way through it, faerie is an imaginative landscape that chimes with Holly's teenage readers. 'One of the things about faerie itself is that the nature of it is all about being in a moment of transformation. Teenagers, who live

between childhood and adulthood, are primed for faerie.'

She knows what she's talking about. Holly's obsession with Faerie began when she was a child, and has never left her. 'My first introduction to faerieland was the illustrated *Faeries* by Brian Froud and Alan Lee – full of strange, sexy, immensely beautiful folk. I always thought of faeries in that landscape. It led to me finding more boots set in faerie – it was my imaginative territory as a child. I went looking for faeries – and if you look for them, you will find them!'

The most compelling thing for Holly, and something that characterises her own books, is the way that faerie-folk are simultaneously relatable and alien to human readers. 'The thing I love most is that they woo you in, where you have these moments, with faeries, where you think they're a little bit like us,' she describes. 'And then – whoa, whoa, not like us!'

Having learned how to navigate it, this uneasy, seductive landscape of faerie is where Holly as a writer feels most at home. 'Being in that space as long as I have it's easy to come back to,' she says. 'I know these places – I know how it works. Faerie is an eco-system and that's interesting. Characters within it

have specific roles, there's rules of bargaining and lies – these structures are very interesting.'

The biggest draw for her, though, is the character of faerie's inhabitants. 'But what I come back to is that there is an alien nature. They look like us but they're not us. They're not human and they've never been human. I always come back to the idea of faerie fruit: ruinously beautiful, ruinously delicious. And even though it's dangerous you'll still want it – and faeries have that quality in a lot of different ways. Ruinous beauty – we want that.'

In *The Wicked King*, and the first book of *The Folk of the Air*, *The Cruel Prince*, this 'ruinous beauty' characterises the title character, Cardan. Beautiful, seductive, mercurial, selfish and dangerous, he

exerts an irresistible pull over Jude, the human taken to Faerie and raised there after the murder of her parents by her faerie stepfather, Madoc. In her turn, their relationship leads the human girl to discover her own powers – considerable, even if not magical.

‘Cardan – he is, like, “I’m terrible” – he tells the world,’ laughs Holly. ‘And Jude is, “you’re terrible, and I could become more terrible than you.” It’s not that he’s a good person, but he’s not the person she thought he was. He’s not a murderer, and he doesn’t want to become one.’

The ideas that give the series traction were all prompted when Holly wrote what would become the prologue to the first book (*The Cruel Prince*). ‘It was the prologue of a changeling story – these three girls who witness the murder of their parents and are taken away to faerieland and grow up with the person who murdered their parents and what that would do. And growing up in that world. When I started writing it I thought it was going to be high fantasy but until I moved it into faerieland it didn’t work.’

Jude is a fascinating character: a girl prepared to take, and wield, extreme power. ‘With Jude, I was interested in,

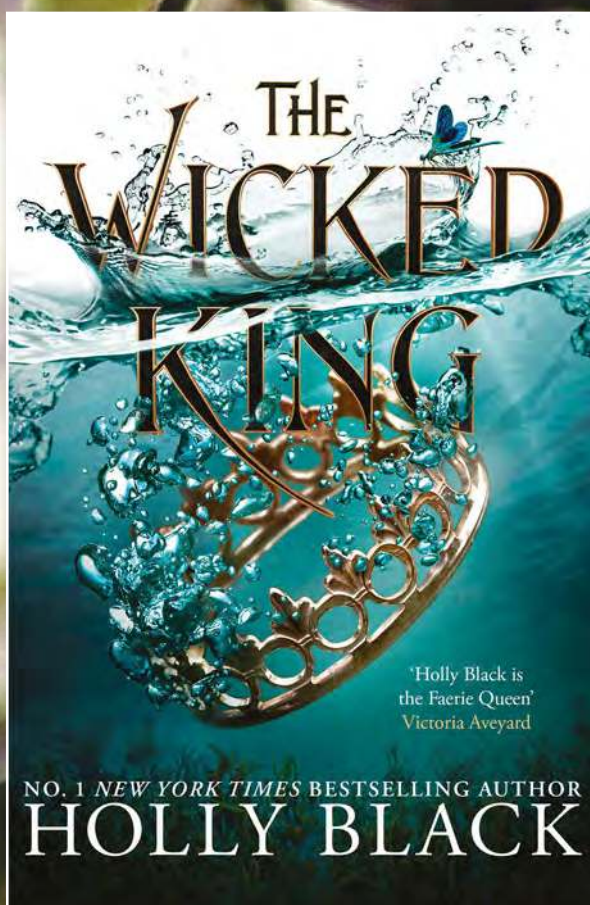
how having been raised with the murder of her parents, everything in her life is imbued with stress,’ says Holly. ‘She can never forget Madoc is a killer, and a killer of her family. She’s good in stressful situations – it’s what she understands – she’s not good when things are calmer. She is tough and clever and she’s made some tough choices, but the ultimate question is, she’s turning into someone like Madoc, and does she want that? Is she willing to go that far? She was raised by a monster in the moral system of faerie – she has a quality of monstrosity.’

Writing fantasy, believes Holly, enables writers to talk about pertinent real-world issues – such as, in Jude’s case, women who behave in ways that are not traditionally feminine. ‘One of the things fantasy allows us to do is tell familiar stories, and tell them slant,’ believes Holly. ‘We talk about werewolves, and not anger. We put aside certain questions and it enables us to ask different questions. When a character in fantasy has this game of ruling the world, that allows us to talk about wielding power. As a woman in the world, in a lot of ways

we are discouraged from wielding power, from being tougher and more skilled than the boys. In fantasy, we put in this epic landscape and talk about it slant.’

If anyone is looking for sweet, pretty fairies fluttering about in flowers, Holly is not the writer for them. In the same way that Susanna Clarke did in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, Holly portrays faerie and its inhabitants as tantalising and fraught with danger for the humans who tangle with it.

‘Going back to the original folklore is very helpful – faeries there are not twee or pretty,’ says Holly. ‘There’s a Scottish tale about a lady who has a baby, and there’s a mermaid who sings every night outside the castle. She sits on her rock and sings and because it disturbs the lady with the baby, they break up her rock. She comes then and sings, your line will die with you. And the next day the baby’s dead. And that’s it. That’s a fairy story: brutal and short. Indicative of what can happen when two groups of beings do not share the same moral system. Fairies represent nature, and they do have that quality of flowers – but nature



“One of the things fantasy allows us to do is tell familiar stories, and tell them slant. We talk about werewolves, and not anger. When a character in fantasy has this game of ruling the world, that allows us to talk about wielding power.”



LISTEN **TAP HERE**

To hear an extract from *The Wicked King*



TAP HERE

To purchase

is also storms and sea and you can't bargain with it.'

Holly writes both middle grade and YA, and she says she knows very early on whether a idea will become a book for one readership, or another.

'I usually think about the books at an early stage as one or the other – middle grade or YA. Middle grade is often about friendship and family – they're really important at that age. YA is often about moving away – you'll still have intense relationships but it's a sense of moving away into independence, who I'll be in the world. I have to think about where I was that each stage. I was very different in those two phases. It's an emotional focus, and a mood difference. I was in a very different emotional state and my interests were so different. When I was in middle grade making up stories was so important – whether it was dolls, or dungeons and dragons – I was so locked in story. In my teenage years I was oh, the world. People.'

By her own admission, Holly was a dreamy kid with little awareness of the world around her. 'I was very spacey, very forgetful,' she smiles. 'I did write

a lot, when I was a kid. I never really understood what was going on. I was always a reader.' She read *Lord of the Rings* while she was still in middle grade. 'When I was 13, 14 for 25¢ I got a copy of Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*. I was obsessed. I was a teenage goth – without any understanding that there was music that went with it. I said I never knew what went on!'

By the time she started writing, her imaginative landscape was firmly in place. 'When I started out I was writing out of my own experience. People I knew. And faeries! But when you do that you have a certain authenticity.'

Keeping a human element in the world of faerie gives Holly the ability to involve readers in a world that is familiar at the same time they're being introduced to the fantasy. 'It really is interesting to write something set in faerie for the first time. In the mortal world I know how things work – I think it is great to have some of the human world because it allows us to see some of how Jude works and it is relatable.'

Believing in the 'real' parts of the

story makes it possible to believe in the magical elements. 'All of fantasy can be relatable, parallel circumstances – things have to feel relatable, faeries have to feel human, and not; strange, and not. When the real world starts to feel more real, the fantasy feels more real. It's like, I've had fish sticks! This is the world I know. It makes it a lot easier to step over into faerie. You have created a universe.'

Holly had a head-start when it came to world-building because the imaginative landscape of faerie had already been mapped out. 'I'm lucky in drawing on folklore,' she says. 'It gives me a lot of the worldbuilding just from the jump.' But what matters for her is to understand how and why the element of magic is used, and to make sure readers can follow the logic.

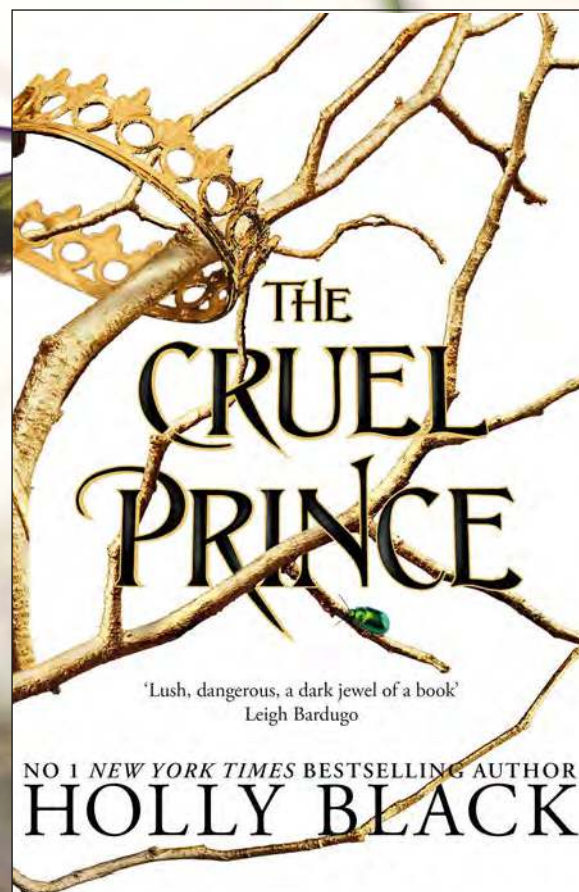
'When I talk about world-building, magic-system building, the magic has to have a price. Some limits. When it's numinous magic where we don't understand the rules, and the rules aren't spelled out, it's really useful to have some kind of thematic structure. You don't have to spell it out – if all the rules follow themselves it will feel right to the reader. They can recognise the shape of

“In faerie there's no internet! I think people are game to imagine a world where it's hard to access. High fantasy can do that. Can you imagine plotting a book set now without phones?”



LISTEN TAP HERE

To hear an extract from *The Cruel Prince*



the story. It does have to feel true. We know how people are and so people have to trust it – trust the people bringing the magic. To get the stuff that people want – power, money, sex. The reasons people commit crimes are going to be what they want to do with magic.'

The most important thing to remember about creating a fantastical realm, believes Holly, is that readers can relate to, and understand, the characters who operate within it. 'In fantasy, we get to see human nature transplanted. Building the world, the world has to feel as lived in as our world. Having the best of human nature as well as the worst – epic actions. Fantasy has to have all of that stuff that we have in the real world – plus all the added layers.'

Some of the layers Holly adds – dark layers of violence and tension – come from genres other than fantasy. 'I spent some time when I was writing the *Magical Monsters* books reading noir crime fiction,' she says. 'I learned a lot about tension and creating suspense, which I recognised did some interesting textual things. People perceive faerie as twee and one of things I want to do straight from the jump is reassure you that it won't be that. Elements from crime and horror will do that – say these are not twee Victorian faeries.'

In places Holly's work is very dark indeed, and in *The Folk of the Air*, Jude's relationship with violence, murder and intrigue makes her a compelling central character but an atypical heroine. 'YA is a category of publishing and there are limits to what you can do in YA but things are always changing,' says Holly. 'It's the way things are written. The thing I'd be excited to do in a book about adults is look at the long history – a bleakness. There is bleak YA but I think it's texturally different. In adult fiction you can do dullness – boring in a pleasurable way. In adulthood the great danger is that you can be stuck, in a way that is not present in teen fiction. The fear of adulthood is that you are stuck. Being a teenager, you are experiencing everything for the first time. You're in a period of transformation. It comes upon you and sometimes it does not feel good, or easy. But it does feel understandable.'

Although there are generational differences between her own experience and that of today's teenagers, Holly believes

that a YA writer should draw on their own memories of what it actually felt like to be an adolescent. 'It is helpful to remember what I was really doing and how it really felt. When I look at teenagers they seem so young, but when I think back to how I was, I didn't feel that. I have to go back. In terms of your mental landscape, what you were interested in, what you were doing – sneaking out! – I wouldn't be doing the same things that people do now, but I'd feel like that.'

At the same time, it's important to be aware of how modern teens live their lives and what's important to them. 'You have to be aware that this is a different time. People have cell phones, different influences, different books. It's a balancing act. But part of being a writer is being interested, and being totally different, from ourselves.'

It helps the strangeness that faerie doesn't have some of the influences that today's teens, raised with social media, take for granted. 'In faerie there's no internet!' notes Holly. 'I think people are game to imagine a world where it's hard to access. High fantasy can do that. Can you imagine plotting a book set now without phones?'

Above all, she believes writers of YA fantasy should write in the imaginative space that fires them up, and make it their own. 'When I started writing, I wanted to be a good writer and I learned to write for my writer soul – to look at, what is the book I want? The landscape that's yours, that you want to write in, is the one you love. Finding the space where you are really alive because readers will respond with pleasure. If you love it, other readers will love it too.' **WM**



How I got published



'No. 'Oh my gosh you will hear that word a lot. I think I was rejected by every single agent in London before I finally hired a mobile billboard adorned with artwork from my best-selling but self-published zombie series, *The Undead*, and knocked on every agent's door to hand them a flyer. It was all very tongue in cheek and silly, and in retrospect it probably did me more harm than good as most of them had serious sense of humour failure and told me to sod off. (The publishing world is a very serious place donchaknow.)

I had self-belief though, so I just kept going until the wonderfully lovely Joanna Swainson agreed to take me on.

Quick note on the difference between self-belief and delusion. One is the ability to take feedback and use it to shape your work without being precious while having bucket loads of energy, lots of discipline and a desire to achieve. The other is refusing to accept critique and then getting bitter when it either doesn't get signed or doesn't sell.

'So, I had created *The Undead*. A self-published zombie series that was doing very well, and it was that work we initially took to publishers.

'They all said no (that word again). One of those publishers, however, really took the effort to give positive, friendly and encouraging feedback – and that was 47North, an imprint of Amazon publishing, who said they love my writing style and suggested I write new material.

I'd already formed an idea to venture into time travel after ploughing through tons of good science fiction books, and I had also always wanted to write a character based on my grandfather who served in the Royal Navy in WWII. Those things all led to *Extracted* being created, and because of the decency of 47North I insisted the book went to them first. I was advised to submit to everyone to get the best deal, but I was determined that I wanted to be published by 47North. You can't put a price on positive decency in my view.

Jane Snelgrove – the commissioning editor at that time – read *Extracted* and loved it, but she quite rightly expressed concern that putting a writer with such a strong self-publishing background through an intensive editorial process might be hard. I was used to having full

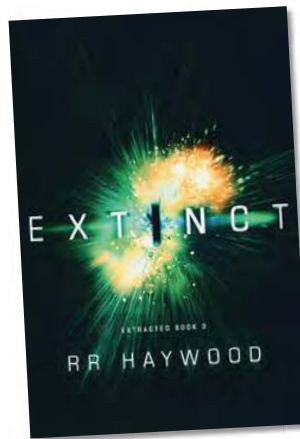
creative control you see. Joanna and I discussed it and she made me aware just how hard editorial can be and we duly signed and went for it. (It was hard too but see above about being willing to learn and take feedback.)

'Since then, I've published a trilogy with 47North and what really stands out is their decency. Plus they sold a massive amount of books which took *Extracted* to the #1 chart position in the UK, US and Australia. Woohoo!

'All in all, I strongly believe that behaviour breeds behaviour, and it was my own desire to achieve and willingness to learn, coupled with the enthusiasm of Joanna and then the decency, astonishing attention to detail and motivation of the publisher that made it all happen.

'You can write a good book but 99% of the time that won't be enough. Writing is craft – everything else is business. Learn to listen. Learn when to be passive and say thank you and be earnest about it. Then, when you need to be passionate to protect that stylistic paragraph, or character reaction, or that line of dialogue then the people around you will be more likely to listen.

'It's not easy, not by any regard, but it is achievable and from great effort comes great reward.'



RR HAYWOOD

The bestselling science fiction writer tells **Dolores Gordon Smith** how he learned not to take 'no' for an answer

Jack Butler, editor at Amazon Publishing



'The moment I first read *Extracted* I knew that we had found a vibrant new voice in science fiction. Rich's trilogy is effortlessly hilarious, and perfectly blends fast-paced action with technical time travel trivia. It's rare to come across a writer so talented that they are able to capture the banter and camaraderie of a group of renegades while also compelling you to care deeply for them.

'These books are perfect for fans of action thrillers with a sci fi twist, and although they might boggle your mind as you jump with Ben Ryder and co through past, present and future, I guarantee that you will enjoy the ride as much as I did.'

The Extracted series by RR Haywood is out now, published by 47 North.

Top tips

- Stay positive. Even when it's all a bit glum. The road to success is littered with people who gave up.
- Read bestsellers from new stuff to classics. What are they doing? How are they doing it? Compare it to your own work. How can you be better?
- Dialogue is vital. People rarely talk to themselves to carry a plotline forward so why have a character do it?
- Find good honest pre-readers and listen to them.
- Be very wary of anyone telling you how great they are. The truly gifted rarely boast. The same with rude and arrogant people within the industry. They do not deserve you.

ASK A LITERARY CONSULTANT



All manuscripts need editing – but what kind of editing, and when? **Helen Corner-Bryant** explains the different edits a writer might expect

Q I'm looking to bust some industry jargon: can you explain the difference between a line edit, copyedit and proofread? At which stage are these different processes needed, and do I need all three?"

A Great question and one close to our heart! I've outlined a list of editorial processes and when these might occur during the manuscript's editorial journey. However, this doesn't have to be followed in order; it's probably best to look at it more as a menu of choices.

Structural or developmental edit

Structural editing is creative as well as technical, with a focus on brainstorming and implementing revisions with the author. Expect to spend considerable time within this process; there's little point racing to a line edit if the story isn't working as well as it could be. Structural editing allows an editor to look at a story's content and whether it's working on every level in the best way. During a structural edit, an editor will predominantly look at:

- **Structure and plot:** the shape of the story and if the external plot drives the story forwards and inspires the character(s) to react and change.
- **Character:** the heart of the story and if the protagonist's emotional arc and conflict are fully realised and in a cause and effect way drive the plot forwards.
- **Other areas:** viewpoint, dialogue, and description; tension, pace, and overwriting; scene structure and whether vital scenes are being 'shown'. At Cornerstones, we feel that 'showing' encompasses all the best writing techniques, encouraging the reader to make their own connections. 'Telling' also has its place, notably to describe journeys or the passage of time. Generally speaking, however, 'telling' (which can hide itself very well) ought to be stripped away.

These edits can come in the form of an editorial letter (the most common) or a margin comment read, where an editor marks up the manuscript's margins with notes on how they're responding to the story.

The last stage of an author's structural edit is the line edit, which

is conducted on a micro scale. The editor will be looking at the manuscript's writing, stylistics, and narrative, checking for continuity issues, making red pen edits sentence by sentence with in-line comments. It is a highly creative, technical, and fastidious process. While the editor may tweak the grammar in places and circle or amend typos, this is not a copyedit nor a proofread.

Copyedit

This type of edit requires its own skill set, so don't expect your structural editor to copyedit and vice versa, although some editors can do both. A copyeditor will check for style, grammar, and syntax and raise comments if they're unclear of the intended meaning. They may go ahead and make changes and deletions as they see fit, which the author can accept or reject. They will also check for consistency across details such as character descriptions, plot, timelines, and facts. For instance, if the heroine has flowing red hair in chapter one which then becomes a brunette bob in chapter eight (with, of course, no plot explanation as to its effect), this would be flagged as an inconsistency. Likewise, if a character flings open the French windows in a novel set in 15th century France, a copyeditor may check if French windows existed back then. Ultimately, though, it's the author's responsibility to check that their facts are correct, especially if the setting is historical, foreign, or relates to a specialist subject.

Proofread

An author should check that their manuscript has almost no typographical errors before submitting to an agent or editor. Manuscripts on track to be published will be proofread in-house. This involves checking that all punctuation is correctly in place and that there are no typos. You'll then get to read your proofed MS just before it's due to be published, which is great fun! Bear in mind that this is not the time to decide that you would prefer your heroine to have flowing red hair after all.

In summary, the many layers of the editing process will largely be determined by what the author wants, what the editor suggests, what stage the manuscript is at, and how clean it is. **WU**



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-Victoria Selman, *Blood For Blood* (Thomas & Mercer, 2019)

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A TRIUMPH OF TEAMWORK

Finding your tribe makes the life of a writer a more positive, and productive, experience, says author **Fionnuala Kearney**



George Orwell once said: 'Writing a book is a horrible exhausting struggle, like a long bout of a painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven by some demon which one can neither resist nor understand.'

That's quite an explicit statement and not necessarily encouraging to those who might be contemplating the act! And whilst I'm not sure I fully agree with the 'horrible, exhausting struggle' part, having now written three published novels, I do understand the sentiment behind the words. Writing a book is hard. It takes discipline and courage to face the blank page – to attempt to create something even when the muse might be missing. Yet, as Orwell hinted, the need to write is an itch in our DNA that demands to be scratched, rather than a simple desire to do so. We

novelists are often driven by our own incomprehensible and innate urge to tell a tale.

I've wanted to write since my late teens – since I scribbled angst-ridden poems for my boyfriend, since I was acknowledged for grade A essays in school, since I later took my first adult creative writing class. I knew that someday, sometime, I would have to follow that yearning to become a writer.

When the opportunity arose, decades later, after a soul-searching conversation with my husband about whether I could give up a career and steady income to pursue the dream, he told me, 'You've been talking about it for years – time to get on with it.' From that moment, I started to envisage myself as a 'proper-writer-of-stories'. I imagined it, felt it, smelled it and rolled it around my tongue. I looked in the mirror, pointed a finger at my image and told it, 'You too can do it, you know...'

Yet, no sooner was the ink dry on my resignation letter when the fear hit; when my inexperienced soul began to worry about this new solitary life I was about to embrace. I worried whether, after many years of working with others, I'd be able to work alone. I worried whether I'd start talking to myself and drinking alcohol before 4pm. Writing, this role I had only ever dreamed of, suddenly loomed large like a pretty lonely pursuit. And for a brief snippet in time, during those first few weeks, it was. I sat at my desk, wrote a few mediocre short stories, made many notes on an idea I'd had for a novel, cobbled together something I thought might resemble a chapter – but I was clueless, genuinely didn't have a 'scooby-doo' what I was doing. Somehow, while foraging in the hitherto unexplored world wide

web (well, it was pretty alien to me), I found my way to an online writing community – immediately presenting a new realm full of promise and creativity – and people just like me.

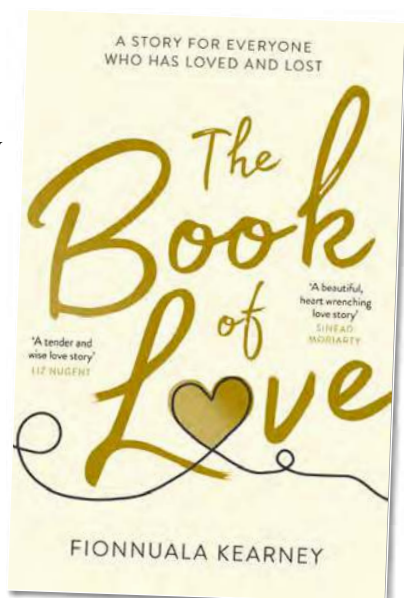
That first venture into that online writer's group changed my life, and I don't use that expression lightly. I had lived a previous successful career in a more corporate world working with colleagues and clients – real people. So, to discover that though the life of a writer could be lived in isolation, it didn't need to be – to come across other people in the same position, other people with the same desires and dreams, other people living it – was transformative.

I had found my tribe.

It was the early-ish days of the internet – not quite the era of that ancient clicking sound when you might try and go online – but nor was it the user-friendly, swipe-to-find-an-immediate-answer tool it is today. Back then, I was nervously navigating my way around, and finding that place where other published and unpublished people offered to critique your work and you did the same for them; a forum where camaraderie existed and people shared in their successes (and failures) was a vital part of my (and their) journey. Many of the members of that first online group remain firm friends of mine today, all of us sharing our own routes to publication and beyond.

As a published author now, I'm often asked if the day-job is a lonely one. I think some people have a caricature image of an isolated figure clacking away in a draughty garret, which, I suppose, was exactly the fear I had when starting out. Yes, I work alone, but since those first few intrepid weeks, I have never felt lonely doing so. My head is filled with my character's lives and dramas and sometimes what goes on between my ears can seem louder and more crowded than a television soap episode on steroids!

I admit the act of writing itself – that time during the writing of



The Book of Love by Fionnuala Kearney (HarperFiction) is out now in paperback, ebook and audiobook.

that first draft where you are your characters – remains for me a necessarily solitary one. You silence the noise. You delve deep. You feel the story elements and write with the senses. That scent of a spiced Christmas cake being baked in your childhood; that sensation of your scalding coffee on the edge of your lips; the voice of a loved one on the end of a phone – all things that in the space of solitude, with only

the keyboard for company, can be fleshed into something meaningful on the page. Certainly, in my experience, while writing 400 pages of narrative, there is a time and place for 'alone'. Yet the total life-span of creating a novel involves a group effort and doesn't allow

and my first 'go-to' for a listening ear and like-minded company.

Over the years, the tribe has grown from a few people in that same group, to include many other authors whom I'm lucky enough to call friends. I'm a member of a group called The Prime Writers, all of whom had their debut novel traditionally published after reaching the age of forty. (Mine was closer to fifty but let's not tell anyone that...) At least once a year, some of us head off into the wilds of Wales on a writing retreat together. This particular gathering (unlike the various lunches through the year) is far from a social whirl, and is instead, a period of time where we genuinely work hard on our respective word counts. We beta-read for one another, offering that first critical eye on a work-in-progress. We bounce ideas off one another, listen, talk, laugh and cry. We go through plot holes,

To come across other people in the same position, with the same desires and dreams, was transformative.

much room for loneliness. Aside from contact with fellow writers and beta-readers, if the work is contracted there is lots of busy interaction with an editorial team, publicity and marketing people, not to mention post-publication events or festival attendance – just a few collaborative ingredients of a writer's life.

One of the things I have grown to love, respect, need and hopefully never under-value in this journey of the imagination is the support received from other writers. I have one particular beta-reader, who reads early drafts for me and I do the same for her. I think we would both agree, if asked, that our respective works benefit from early critique and our minds certainly benefit from early validation. She's one of that original internet forum

discuss the vagaries of our wayward characters and, of course, the workings of the publishing industry with one another. We have each other's backs.

As Stephen King said in his brilliant book *On Writing*, where he discusses the fact that writing can be a lonely role: 'Having someone who believes in you makes a lot of difference. They don't have to make speeches. Just believing is usually enough.'

Most of us have these believers in our lives – editors, agents, tribal mates. Gone are the days where our craft need be a solo occupation, unless of course, you want it to be. But for me, I know I do better when I can tap into a real or virtual 'gather at the water-cooler moment' for a chat. For me, I know I do better when I feel a sense of belonging. www.writers-online.co.uk



Flying SOLO

Going it alone to get your book out is well within your grasp, says writer **Linda Fawke** as she describes her experience of self-publishing

I am a self-published author of two novels. I say it proudly – there was a time it would have implied I'd paid a vanity publisher to get my books 'out there'. Things have changed; the publishing world has changed.

Getting an agent and a publisher, while regarded by many as the ultimate goal, is rarely easy. You may have to wait months or even years. You may wait forever. Publishers are risk-averse and wary of investing time and money in unknown authors. I decided I didn't want to wait. Self-publishing is achievable, quick and can cost little or nothing.

Who uses self-publishing? It's used by authors who want total control over their writing, by those who know there is a narrow market for highly specialised work or by writers who want a book for limited distribution, a family memoir, perhaps. And by folk like me.

There are options available if you choose the self-publishing route. You can do it entirely on your own or you can use a company (like Matador or Amazon) who will do the technical stuff for you. Those are stress-free, reliable options and there are various services available at a wide range

of prices. You need to budget from £1,000 upwards – it depends on what you want. Some writing friends told me I'd need to be a computer whizz-kid to go it alone. They were wrong. While the process isn't without its ups and downs, it's doable with a minimum of computer knowledge. You simply have to be able to follow instructions.

I chose Amazon's CreateSpace for my paperback and Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) for the ebook. You don't have to publish in both formats but I saw no reason not to do so. The whole process is free. Amazon makes its money from commission on sales. Since I last published with CreateSpace (September 2018), all self-publishing has been taken over by KDP.

Getting the manuscript ready

While the actual publishing process is quick, there's considerable work to put in beforehand. It isn't essential to have a book edited professionally but I chose to take this route. I considered it a worthwhile, additional cost.

Most people write in Word and the appearance of a Word document, printable on an A4 sheet of paper, is different from that of a book. So, after editing, it's time for formatting.

This includes spacing, choosing a font and font size, adding page numbers (and deciding

where to put them), choosing the size of the book (there are various standard sizes), how you want the beginning of each chapter to look (maybe starting each chapter part-way down the page), whether you want a header (the book's title on each page) and putting in page breaks as appropriate. Because you have to take the binding of the book into account, you need 'mirrored' margins, where the inner margin is wider than the outer one. I could continue...

If this sounds daunting, I'm not surprised. But I found by addressing one point at a time, it all came together. I suggest, before you start, you look at books on your bookshelf and decide how you'd like yours to look. Find the size you like, look at the width of the margins, what size font is easy on the eye? Then decide.

You also need to think about the additional information you'll need. This includes a title page, some details about yourself as author, a copyright statement, ISBN number, a list of acknowledgements, maybe a dedication or a contents page. Again,

look at a few books and see how this information is laid out. Then add them into your Word manuscript.

The self-publishing process

You need an Amazon account to use their process. Beyond that, it's a case of doing as you are told – this is not the place to be creative! I found it helpful to work with someone, my husband in my case, as a second pair of eyes is useful. He was also a calming influence and scraped me off the ceiling when things went wrong! The 'going wrong' was usually because I'd done something silly in the formatting rather than a problem with the process itself. I suggest if you are producing a paperback and an ebook, you do the paperback first. This is the more complicated of the two; the ebook process follows on. Amazon will instruct you clearly at each step, will prompt you to upload your formatted document and will check the book is in a suitable format to be published.

You can review the book online as it will actually look using Adobe Flash Player. You see your text as a book and turn the pages. It is an excellent way of judging whether you've got all your formatting right, whether the book looks just as you want it to. You can go round the loop as many times as you wish before you actually publish. You simply make whatever changes are necessary to the formatted Word document and upload it again. You have to wait a number of hours for the online checking process but the system keeps you informed. There is a free 'help' service which is useful and responsive if you get stuck.

You can do your final proof-read online before publishing. I, however, wanted a paper copy in my hands. Somehow, proof reading demands that! It cost around \$5, plus postage. It was worthwhile – I found errors I'd missed on the screen. From embarking on the publishing process to completion took less than two weeks – but this was from the point of having a fully and (almost) correctly formatted book.

Your book does, of course, have to have a front and back cover. Amazon provides a Cover Creator tool but I decided to be independent. I knew

what I wanted and needed my covers to be unique and professional. I therefore commissioned a graphic artist to design, produce and make them suitable for publication. (Costs are from £100 upwards.) I worked on my 'brand' – the fonts, layout and colours are similar for both novels. I'm a firm believer that a self-published book should look as good – and read as well – as a traditionally published one. I believe I've achieved this with my books.

For my ebook, the process was straightforward. The manuscript was already formatted. I took out page numbers (not required) and put in a contents page with hyperlinks to each chapter. The KDP process looks after everything else.

There are a few other matters to be sorted, like price and distribution, but the online prompts make this easy.

I spoke to two fellow, self-published authors about their experiences. Mariana Swann, whose autobiographical novel, *Pachamama*, was self-published using CreateSpace, chose a different route from mine. As a new author, she feared the book's appearance might not be as good as it could be so she chose to pay Amazon for formatting, cover design and three rounds of editing. She said the cost was 'steep, very steep' but considered it worthwhile. The final product is certainly professional.

My editor, Jonathan Veale, a writer himself, whose 2018 novel, *A Chateau To Die For*, is available in Kindle format, chose self-publishing as a rapid means of getting his writing into other people's hands. His view is that while writers should be aware of the technical and promotional aspects of publishing they should concentrate on the writing itself – the better the product, the easier it will be to sell – and purely oversee the business aspects, paying for them as required.

Marketing

I'm not a sales person. I've never worked in marketing. So I found book promotion difficult. However, even in the traditional publishing world authors are often now required to do much marketing. Although the main outlet for sales is Amazon, self-published authors can buy books at a

special author rate and I've done that so I have my own stock to distribute and sell.


I put together my plan. I liaised with my local library, where the librarian offered to host a book launch for me (a short talk and a reading, a book signing, some refreshments). They also put up posters and sent out press releases. Social media is important. I used all my email, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter contacts, sending out regular communications before and after the launch. I contacted my previous workplace and my old school, both of which provided some publicity. *Writing Magazine* featured me in Subscriber Showcase and on its website. I've put up posters. I did a writing course a while ago with the Writers' Bureau and they publicised me. As I write for our local county magazine (*Berkshire Life*), they published pieces about me. I've been interviewed on local radio and featured in several local publications and newspapers. I give talks to local groups, notably the Women's Institute, on 'Becoming a Writer', where I sell books. A local bookshop is stocking my books.

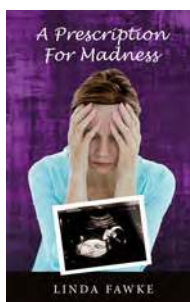
This doesn't mean I have a bestseller on my hands – but I do sell books. I'm constantly looking out for new means of promotion.

The bottom line

What are the pros and cons of self-publishing? The obvious advantage is speed and ownership of the process. The costs can be minimal. Anyone can do it. As my books are print on demand, there is no stock to be paid for and kept in a warehouse.

The disadvantages include not having editorial input from an agent and publisher but you can pay for editing, as I did. If your books are printed outside the UK, there is also postage to consider.

And should you go it alone or pay a company to do it for you? A personal choice. Both work and it may well be a financial decision. If you commission many services, it can become expensive. Either way, I recommend self-publishing. I'm pleased I did it myself, at reasonable cost – and my marketing skills are improving! 





The style & technique of

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

His Middle-earth combined heroic epics with middle-class rural England, says **Tony Rossiter**

He was not the first writer of fantasy, but he is without doubt one of its founding fathers. As the late Terry Pratchett put it, 'Most modern fantasy just rearranges the furniture in Tolkien's attic.' During his lifetime (1892-1973) his fame rested almost entirely on *The Hobbit* (1937) and the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). After his death his son Christopher published *The Silmarillion* and other works based on his father's extensive notes and unpublished manuscripts.

Early days

Tolkien, who was born in South Africa, moved to England with his mother and brother when he was three years old. They lived in Sarehole, a village in Worcestershire, and the surrounding countryside, including his aunt Jane's farm of Bag End, inspired many scenes in his books. After his mother's death, he grew up in Edgbaston, where the nearby waterworks' tower and Perrott's Folly probably contributed to the images of the dark towers in his works. In the summer of 1911, shortly before going up to Exeter College, Oxford, he went on a walking holiday in Switzerland and hiked from Interlaken to Lauterbrunnen – a trek which, many years later, inspired his description of Bilbo's journey (in *The Hobbit*) across the Misty Mountains.

At Oxford, Tolkien initially studied classics but soon switched to English

language and literature, graduating in 1915 with first-class honours. As a student he began work on *The Story of Kullervo*, a retelling of an old Finnish poem, which Tolkien described as 'the germ of my attempt to write legends of my own'. Discovered among his unfinished manuscripts after his death, it is regarded by critics and experts as 'a foundation stone in the structure of Tolkien's invented world'.

After serving in the Army from October 1915 until 1920, Tolkien returned to Oxford, where he worked briefly on the *Oxford English Dictionary* – mainly on the history and etymology of words of Germanic origin beginning with the letter W. He then took up a post as reader in English language at the University of Leeds, where he produced *A Middle English Vocabulary* and (with EV Gordon) a definitive edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; both became standard academic works.

In 1925 Tolkien returned to Oxford as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College. Alongside his academic work, he built a world on scraps of paper. He doodled in ballpoint pen on the pages of broadsheet newspapers, next to completed cryptic crosswords, news stories and property advertisements, drawing his swirling designs – fronds of unknown plants, teardrops of paisley and geometric patterns. Later he transferred the doodles he liked best to better paper and used them as the decorative elements (ceramics, carpets, belt clasps) of imagined

civilisations. Eventually college dinner menus, spare exam sheets and other ephemera were filled with maps of Middle-earth, sketches of looming fortresses and delicate Elvish devices.

Tolkien had a strong belief in the inextricable link between language and culture. In the 1930s he charted the imagined evolution of the languages of Middle-earth. Once he had the languages, he saw the need for myths, stories and legends to keep them alive. In creating Middle-earth, Tolkien combined the heroic Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian epics he studied and taught at Oxford with the middle-class rural England he knew and loved.

Influences

Tolkien's fiction was the result of diverse influences, but was inspired particularly by his love of early Germanic and Old English literature, poetry and mythology. These were his areas of academic expertise as a philologist and university professor, but he was influenced by a huge range of mythological and linguistic sources, beliefs, cultures and experiences.

One of his greatest influences was William Morris of the Arts and Crafts Movement, from whose prose and poetry romances he took inspiration for features such as Mirkwood in *The Hobbit* and the Dead Marshes in *The Lord of the Rings*. Another strong influence was Edward Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Other influences included H Rider Haggard's novel *She* and Edward Wyke-Smith's *The Marvellous Land of*

Snergs, which strongly influenced the incidents, themes, and the depiction of Bilbo's race, in *The Hobbit*. As a boy Tolkien was impressed by SR Crockett's historical novel *The Black Douglas*, and he based the Necromancer (Sauron) in *The Lord of the Rings* on its villain, Gilles de Retz; incidents in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are similar in narrative and style to the Crockett's novel.

The Hobbit

One day in the early 1930s when Tolkien was marking School Certificate papers, he took a blank sheet of paper and, suddenly inspired, wrote the words 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit'. *The Hobbit* (1937) was published almost by chance. In 1936, four years after it had been written for his own children without any thought of publication, it came by sheer accident to the attention of Susan Dagnall, who worked for the publishing firm George Allen and Unwin. She persuaded him to submit it for publication. When it was published a year later, the book attracted adult readers as well as children, and became so popular that the publishers asked Tolkien to produce a sequel.

The Hobbit is the heroic story of Bilbo, a small, charming person – about half the size of a human, with hairy feet and a passion for food, drink and comfort. He leaves his village, the Shire, accompanying a group of dwarves who are seeking to reclaim their treasure from a dragon. Even though the story was originally written just for his own children, Tolkien took infinite care over the details of his created world. It was an invented world of fantasy, but it had to be a believable reality – without any unbelievable facts. Among Tolkien's manuscripts was a small piece of paper headed 'Hobbit Long Measures', which begins with the approximate size of a hobbit's toenail – half an inch – and extrapolates from that the size of the foot, the length of its stride and the amount of ground a hobbit might cover in a day.


Bilbo is a humble, unambitious hobbit who has no idea how

resourceful he is until he is put to the test. His comfortable life is interrupted when the wizard Gandalf and a company of dwarves arrive on his doorstep to whisk him away on a journey 'there and back again'. The plot is a combination of three of the oldest of all plots – 'overcoming the monster', 'the quest' and 'voyage and return'. There are plenty of dangerous adventures and conflicts, but a central theme of the novel is Bilbo's personal growth, as he accepts the adventurous side of his nature, applies his wits and common sense, and gains a new level of maturity and competence. There is a large cast of creatures that are basically either good (a wizard, dwarves, elves, eagles) or bad (trolls, goblins, wolves, giant spiders and a dragon).

The Lord of the Rings

In 1945 Tolkien became Professor of English Language and Literature at Merton College, Oxford (he remained there until his retirement in 1959). His publisher's request for a sequel to *The Hobbit* prompted him to begin what would become his most famous work. He took more than ten years over *The Lord of the Rings*, published in three volumes (1954–1955). During this time he read parts of the manuscript to the Inklings, the Oxford group of writers who met regularly at the Eagle and Child pub and elsewhere in the city. He received continuing support from the Inklings, and especially from his particular friend CS Lewis (author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*). After its publication Lewis wrote: 'No imaginary world has been projected which is at once multifarious and so true to its own inner laws; none so seemingly objective, so disinfected from the taint of an author's merely individual psychology; none so relevant to the actual human situation yet free from allegory. And what fine shading there is in the variations of style to meet the almost endless diversity of scenes and characters – comic, homely, epic, monstrous, or diabolic'.

Tolkien at first intended *The Lord of the Rings* to be a children's tale in the style of *The Hobbit*, but it quickly grew darker and more serious in the writing. Though a direct sequel to *The Hobbit*, it addresses an older audience, drawing on the immense backstory of Beleriand, a region in north-western Middle-earth that Tolkien had constructed in previous years, and which eventually saw posthumous publication in *The Silmarillion* and other volumes. With his portrayal of the forced industrialisation of the Shire, the novel also reflects Tolkien's hatred for the side effects of industrialisation, which he considered to be devouring the English countryside and destroying the old pattern of life. Ultimately, it's an old-fashioned tale of good against evil.

The Lord of the Rings became immensely popular in the 1960s and has remained so ever since, gaining renewed attention by the award-winning films of 2001–2003 and consistently ranking as one of the 20th century's best-loved novels. 



Goldfish moments

Drifting off into a day dream can do wonders for your creativity, believes **Adrian Magson**

During a recent writing bout I found myself drifting off into what might be best called a secondary plot direction, complete with additional characters, momentous events, bursts of vivid action and flashes of brilliant and eye-dazzling prose. It was good while it lasted, as the actress said to the bishop, but soon forgotten.

Nothing new in that, I told myself, and got back on course with the plot I was already working on. I say nothing new because this happens quite a lot, and has been for as long as I've been writing. I call them my goldfish moments, named after my favourite Far Side cartoon where a group of Viking warriors is laying siege to a castle. As they cross the drawbridge, one of them, instead of focussing on the job at hand, looks down into the water and cries, 'Ooh! Goldfish, everyone! Goldfish!'

But at least I did benefit a little this time; I got the spark of an idea which I incorporated into the current work, and there were a couple of other elements which might be useful in another project. So all was not lost by this minor distraction.

To me, it's no different to real dreaming at night. I might not always remember my dreams in detail, but every now and then I wake up with a very clear scene in my head which stays with me. It's like having my own video streaming channel which can be picked over for useful ideas... or tossed aside because sometimes dreams simply make no sense at all and are best forgotten.

Day dreaming, according to some experts, is a natural way of relieving

stress on the brain when we're heavily focused on a specific problem, or if we're feeling overwhelmed by the world going on around us. Staring at a blank page or an idea that simply will not tease itself out into something lucid and attractive is the most obvious example for writers. It's frustrating and often self-defeating, because we end up writing something unsatisfactory.

Worse, we might even end up with the dreaded fear that we've developed writer's block. (Yuk. Take that thought away).

It has long been agreed that the brain is said to contain areas of untapped potential which are only beginning to be touched on. But it's slow progress. Personally, I'm quite happy to go along with this and allow my untapped grey matter to take over from time to time in the hope that it will surprise me with a solution to a problem, or even bring on a wholly new idea that has sprung from those recesses I didn't even know existed.

Some writers simply don't allow this kind of stress relief. They take the view instead that they must get the job done or that to 'let go' for a moment into abstract – or what they might call useless – thought is unproductive. (You can usually tell who they are by their expression of an egg-bound chicken.) In not letting go, they're possibly increasing their stress levels, yet won't allow themselves a few moments of harmless cloud-watching because they don't believe in it. But if that works for them, who am I to argue?

As a daydreamer of long standing, I can attest that it works – at least

for me. And I have a long line of teachers, parents and other interested individuals over the years willing to back me up – or at least those that are still around. Okay, so not all of them believed that it did me any good, but maybe I just haven't yet found my true potential.

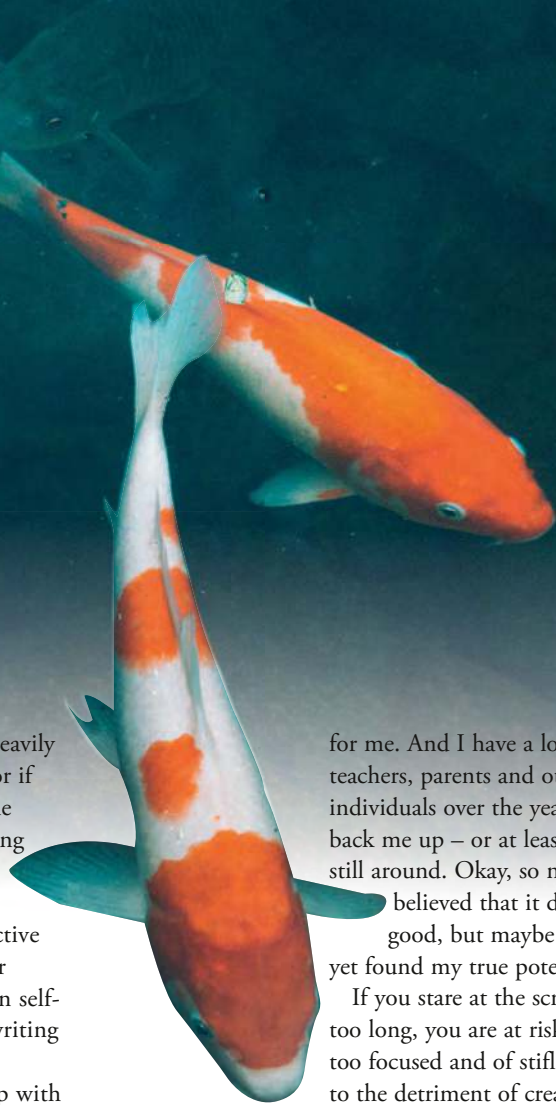
If you stare at the screen or paper too long, you are at risk of becoming too focused and of stifling yourself to the detriment of creative thought. Some people go for walks, others eat the contents of the fridge or resort to kicking the furniture – all perfectly helpful albeit not all particularly healthy – which gets them back on track when a storyline is a little sludgy. Personally, I prefer the goldfish moments to help me out, if only because daydreaming while walking in the extensive forest near me can easily get me lost... and there's a lot of forest out there to get lost in.

By not giving in to whatever works for you and allowing yourself these few moments of distraction, you are merely pushing away the possibility of gaining more insights and of skirting around whatever it is that is blocking your current thoughts. And that really doesn't help, especially if deadlines are looming or you just want to get that first piece out of your head and down on paper before you lose the will.

Call me shallow but I'm willing to accept any help I can get. Writing is tough enough without rejecting my untapped potential, real or not. And if daydreaming is one way of doing that, I'm all for it. After all, thinking is being creative at its most basic, so why not. **WM**

Top tips

- Value those moments of drifting off. They can be a useful form of stress-relief.
- What are daydreams if not moments of wild creative insights that might turn into a story?
- The brain often works best when there's no pressure to do so.
- If the subconscious wants to throw a few ideas your way based on what you've been thinking about, why deny it the opportunity?





MARITTA JAYNE

Enthusiastic self-publisher **Maritta Jayne** introduces her writing and her debut novel

It was not until my father died in 2000, following a lengthy illness, that I decided to try to make a go of my writing and achieve something with it,' says Maritta Jayne. 'My childhood was unremarkable – I was born at the end of 1961 and brought up in the South Wales valleys, the eldest of three children – and I was never academically minded at school, but always loved to write.'

'Since 2000, I have completed two courses with the Writers Bureau. The first in 2007 when I completed the 'Comprehensive Writing Course'.

'Almost three years ago, I decided to write my first book and, at that point, had a bit of a rude awakening. I was just about at the point where I was thinking that all I had to do then was hand it to a publisher, and I could sit back and wait for the money to start rolling in. No such luck! It was only then that I was informed that if I wanted to see the money rolling in, I was going to have to earn it. As if writing the whole thing was not enough! I was going to have to be prepared to market both the book and me, myself.

That meant getting out and letting me, and the book, be known, myself. No-one was going to do that for me, even if, like my protagonist, I was confined to a wheelchair. With that in mind, I then completed the 'How to Market Your Book' course with the Writers Bureau too.

'Then, with the help of *Writing Magazine*, I found York Publishing Services. They guided me through the minefield that is self-publishing, thus avoiding any more rejection letters. However, as I found, it was expensive. There was not going to be the 'pot of

gold' at the end of the rainbow as I had hoped, but at least I would be published. Now my first book *Vengeance is Mine* has just been released, available from YPDBooks.com in paperback at £9.99, and in ebook and Kindle versions at £3.99.

'It is a mystery; set in a picturesque village known as Saxon Glade, and it tells the story of a series of tragic events which occurred during the summer months of the previous year.

'It begins when one man, Peter Jackson, inherits the family business following the death of his uncle, and tells of how Peter ends up in prison after killing a young boy playing in the street, whilst drunk-driving.

'Tragedy strikes again when the factory, situated at the edge of the village on an industrial estate, explodes and is obliterated, along with many of the others on the estate.

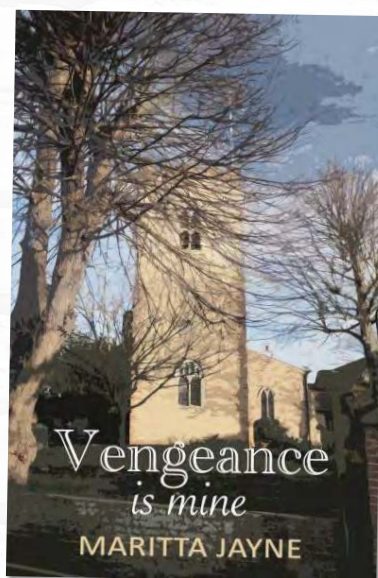
'Most of the villagers worked in the factory, or one of the adjoining factories, and there was no-one else who could

have been suspected of any wrong doing. Even the boy's father, who had been swearing vengeance, had disappeared.

'All of this is seen through the eyes of Camila Edge, a renowned mystery writer often seen wandering around the village in search of a story. And if she could solve a mystery along the way, so much the better.'


My writing day

'My typical writing day does not really exist. I tend to take things as they come. I get up at a reasonable hour and spend some time looking after myself and the flat for



a while. By that time, it is at least mid-morning. Then I check emails, post, texts while my computer is waking up. Then I begin with whatever is left outstanding. I don't have a set plan but like to try to finish one thing off before I start anything new. That way I don't get over-loaded with tasks on the go. This is sometimes unavoidable,' Maritta admits. 'My biggest bug-bear is the phone ringing, or the doorbell going as it will, inevitably, distract me. Once that happens, I find it particularly difficult when that happens to get back into whatever it was that I was doing. That is usually a good time to stop for a cup of tea, or a bit of lunch.'

My writing space

'I write in my spare bedroom. Kitted out with lower-than-usual desks in the far corner. This is usually looking like the average bomb site with files right around the walls; some of them open, others stored away. My computer has pride of place in the corner where there is a space for my legs. Underneath are various bits and pieces; a printer to the left, and a scanner to the right. All of which are used relatively frequently. There are two shelves which are covered in ornaments and family photos, both on the wall by the window and the one opposite too, and a bookcase which is slightly overloaded to the right of the door. Underneath the cabinets there are two drawers which are three drawers deep; So, I am ready for anything. Here's to the future! 

Vengeance Is Mine
is out now. buy it today
www.ypdbooks.com



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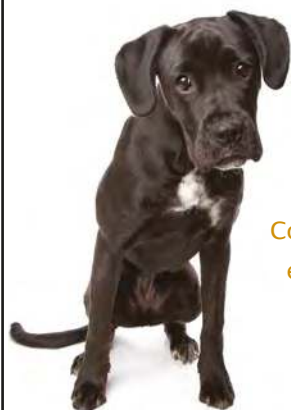
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Smash conventions and cross boundaries with your short story for this month's competition, for a genre-defying (or defining) mash-up. It could be the likes of urban fantasy or domestic noir, but we're really looking for a fresh new approach, so let down your guard and go where your story takes you.

The winner will receive £200 and publication in *Writing Magazine*, with £50 and publication online for the runner-up. The length should be 1,500-1,700 words.

The closing date is 15 May.

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STILL TIME TO ENTER

With its closing date of **15 April**, there's still time to enter last month's open competition, for stories in any genre, with a 750-word limit. Prizes are as above. See p95 for entry details.

1st place

500 WORDS
SHORT STORY
COMPETITION
£200

Amazing Grace

I should have been Mary. I didn't want to be a star or an angel and I definitely didn't want to be a camel. Mum said it was because I wear specs and Mary didn't. That doesn't make sense because camels don't wear specs either. I think the reason Cindy Hetherington is Mary is because her dad's a school governor. I told my dad that and he said that if he ever managed to get a job where he was home before seven thirty then he might have time for all that malarkey.

The worst thing is I'm Balthazar's camel. Joey Aspinall is Balthazar and he's the meanest boy in class. Why couldn't I have been Melchior's camel 'cos that's Andrew. He's dishy. Joey keeps calling me The Hump and threatening to beat me with his staff. If this was the real world instead of Nativity Land I'd report him to the RSPCA for cruelty to camels. One good thing though, that stuck up Geraldine Mather, who's such a goody goody and top of the class, well she's a camel too. She made such a fuss. She was crying and screaming that no way was she going to be a camel. Miss took



Dorothy Snelson retired five years ago, aged seventy, after a career in libraries and civil service. She joined a local writing group, Phoenix Writers, and they encouraged her fledgling talent. She has tried different genres but always feels happiest writing something a little humorous. Her work has appeared in seven anthologies to date, as a result of entering writing competitions. She has had poems and stories performed at her local theatre, the Octagon, in Bolton. She has contributed articles on local history to newspapers and *Lancashire Life* magazine and had articles in *Yours* magazine and *Woman's Weekly*. Twice she has been a runner up in *WM* competitions, so this is third time lucky.

no notice of her and just said that she must learn humility. I'd never heard of humility but I think it must be something like Algebra or French that you perhaps do at secondary school.

Anyway it's the day of the actual Nativity and we are all waiting to get changed into our costumes. The head teacher is coming into the room and telling our teacher that Cindy Hetherington has gone down with a tummy bug and won't be able to take part.

'You will need her standing in, Miss Taylor,' he says.

Teacher looks worried.

'That was Davina and she wasn't in school yesterday. Her mum rang to say she had a heavy cold but was hoping

by Dorothy
Snelson

to be here today. She rang again this morning to say that she was no better. There's nothing for it Mr Grimshaw. One of the other girls will have to dress up and play the part and I will have to say her lines from the wings.'

Already Geraldine has her hand up and is jiggling up and down with excitement and chanting

'Me Miss, me.'

Miss ignores her and looks straight at me.

'Grace. You are Cindy's size. You can take over the part and I'll do the speaking.'

Joey is not happy.

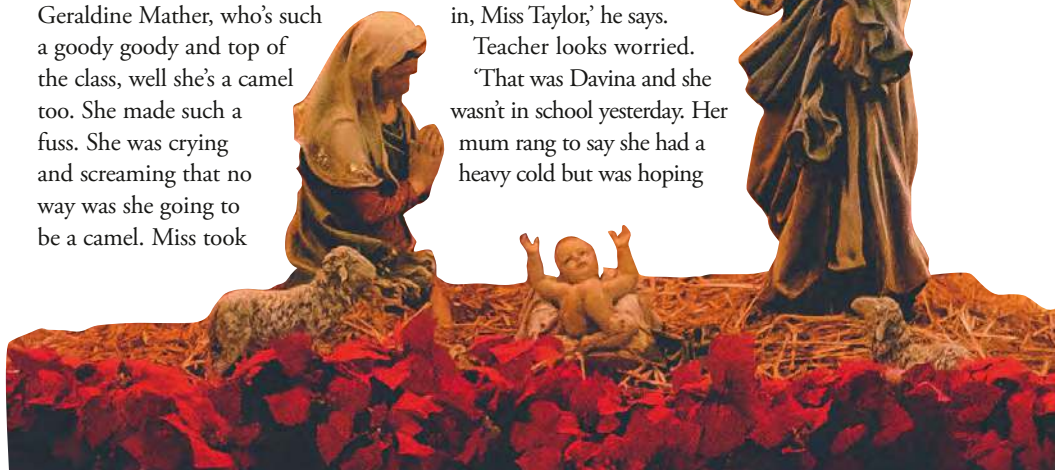
'What about my camel Miss? If she's Mary I won't have a camel.'

Miss pulls a face and sighs.

'Well you'll just have to walk Balthazar. You'll have to practice humility like our good Lord Jesus did.'

There's a lot of it about this humility. Teaching it. Practicing it. I think I'd better find out more about it if it's so popular.

But not before I've starred as the best ever Mary in Brough Street Primary School's greatest ever Nativity play. **WM**



2nd place

500 WORDS
SHORT STORY
COMPETITION
£50

WALK WITH ME THROUGH THE LONG GRASS

AND I SHALL HOLD YOUR HAND

by Steven Holding



Steven Holding lives with his family in Northamptonshire. His stories have been published by *Trembling With Fear*, *Friday Flash Fiction*, *TheatreCloud*, *Ad Hoc Fiction* and in *Massacre Magazine*. He has been shortlisted in several competitions including Flash 500, The Henshaw Prize, Exeter

Flash Fiction, WriteStars, TSS Publishing and others. Most recently, his story *Three Chords and the Truth* received first place in the Inktears 2018 Flash Fiction Competition. He is currently working upon further short fiction and a novel. You can follow his work at www.stevenholding.co.uk

We shared adventures you and I. Seized the weekend by its ankles then hoisted it upside down, furiously shaking Saturdays until nothing remained in its turned-out pockets. Three fuzzy channels in black and white bored us to tears. Who had time to try and decipher the snooker when there was a technicolour world demanding to be explored?

Two kids on their pushbikes (or in rockets, or tanks!) Endless miles of tangled countryside. For us it was a steaming jungle or the deadly surface of Venus; a dried-out ditch a trench in the Somme, a blackberry thicket attacking triflids.

Those fields were our ocean, defining the edges of everything. The rest of the universe, both good and bad, lay quietly waiting for us, out of our sight, somewhere over the horizon.

Growing older, that territory shifted, shaped by nature as well as ourselves, once familiar landmarks assuming a deeper significance within

our ever-expanding lives. Overgrown top-secret dens where dreams were once readily shared now concealed carefully stashed cans and well-thumbed glamour mags; the knotted oak that only you could ever climb looming large in our minds that evening we feasted on the fairy ring we found lurking in its shadow.

The low moan of the rusty kissing gate, and those sweaty days when it finally lived up to its name.

We hadn't talked for years when a newspaper headline yelled out at me from the wire racking of a train station tobacconists. You, of course, had gone on to become quite the celebrity. I, on the other hand, was more than content with my average life and the anonymity it afforded me. Seeing your name, I fumbled to grab a copy, suddenly frozen in time as brief-cased commuters swarmed past me, tutting loudly as I selfishly caused a split-second delay in their journey to who knows where. The print quickly smudged, turning my thumbs and fingers purple as the article informed me of what you had

done; the tabloid seeming to relish its graphic description of every lurid detail. When I saw the location you had chosen, I could feel the place calling out to me immediately.


In a story, I would have dropped everything and boarded a steam train there and then, experiencing deep and meaningful insights as I travelled, gazing from an open window with a melancholic expression. Real life, as we know, is much less dramatic.

Two weeks later I rang in sick to work; made the three-hour drive in my battered hatchback. I would have played our favourite album, but, you know, the stereo was broken.

Parking up by the village green, I was surprised that the gate was still there. Happy that it remained unopened.

Regardless of what I felt, at least your actions took me there once again. Strolling through the long grass, smiling as the sunlight kissed my skin, I think I understood.

If the truth be told, are not all of us simply seeking a way to get back home?

Take my hand. 

Also shortlisted were: **Dominic Bell**, Hull; **Michael Callaghan**, Glasgow; **Jenni Clarke**, Le Vaudouix, France; **Colette Coen**, Glasgow; **Sadie Fleming**, Battle, East Sussex; **Ronnie Karadjov**, Auckland, New Zealand; **Zuzu La Djoï**, Croydon; **Emma J Myatt**, Gourdon, Aberdeenshire; **Nia Williams**, Wrexham; **Stephen Wright**, Leicester.



Writers' toolkit: *Mastering subplots*

Learn how to add layers to your story by following **Diana Kimpton's** advice

Subplots are an excellent way to add complexity and depth to a story, but they can be difficult to master. Unless you are careful, they can distract from the main plot instead of enhancing it – a situation that can make your book less appealing to readers.

Part of the problem is the name subplot. It suggests something that runs underneath the main plot and is less important. But that is not strictly true because, when you're reading or writing a novel, you'll find there are times when the sub-plot is what you're focusing on. If you've ever plaited hair, you'll know that different strands come to the front as you work and that's exactly what happens as we weave the main plot and subplots in our story together.

As a result, I find it less confusing to think of subplots as story strands. That's a better description of their role in a book or script, and it means that we don't have to worry whether a storyline is really a separate subplot or part of the main plot. You can leave that decision to any story analysts who try to dissect your work after it's finished. Interestingly, the tighter your strands are woven together, the harder they will find it to tease them apart again.

How many story strands do you need?

A short story or a children's picture book will work well with just a single storyline. But when you're tackling a longer project, adding extra strands will make the story more interesting and help you with characterisation and pacing. Although my

Pony-Mad Princess books only have 8,000 words each, their plots usually have two story strands: one about the ponies and one about the ups and downs of being a princess. Novels for older children and adults often have even more. In fact, there's no top limit provided you can keep everything clear and don't confuse your readers.

If you are writing a continuing series, you'll obviously have strands that run from book to book to link them together. For instance, the battle against Voldemort runs through the whole Harry Potter series while the growing romance between Ron and Hermione is one of the strands running through the later books. However, this isn't enough by itself. You also need each individual book to have at least one strand that is completely contained within it: for instance, the search for the Philosopher's Stone in the first book of the series and the Triwizard Cup in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. This gives the reader the pleasure of a satisfactory ending to that book while still tempting them to read the next one to discover what happens next in the ongoing strands.

Making story strands work

If your work-in-progress is too short, it's easy to think you can solve the problem by adding a new story strand. Although this is much better than increasing the number of adjectives, it will only work if two things are true.

1 The new strand must be a story in its own right with a beginning, a middle, an end and something at stake that readers will care about.

2 The new strand must connect in some

way with the main plot and/or with other strands of the story.

It's vital that this connection exists, but it doesn't always have to be immediately obvious to the reader. For example, it's common for disaster movies and episodes of *Casualty* to start with the individual stories of the characters who will eventually be in danger. If you decide to use this technique yourself, try not to hold the connection back too long in case your readers lose interest. Sometimes just a hint is enough to hold their attention.

If you put a story strand in your book that's unconnected to anything else, you'll end up jumping back and forth between two unrelated stories – a situation that is unlikely to please your readers. The solution to the problem is to look for ways to link the strands together. One obvious method is to make them both involve the same character, but it's even better if there are other links as well.

Let's imagine we're writing about Dave: a detective who is investigating a murder. It's common in this genre to have a second storyline about the detective's home life so we'll do the same. Dave is in both story strands, but that's not enough to hold readers' attention if the strand about his home life is just a string of scenes of domestic bliss with little or nothing at stake. Creating a problem with Dave's marriage will increase the tension, but it still might not stop this strand being a distraction from the murder investigation. If readers don't care enough about it, they may even start skipping the domestic bits in

order to get on with solving the murder.

The links between the two strands will be much stronger if we make the problems at home connect in some way with Dave's job. Maybe his wife is having an affair with a fellow detective on the same case and that makes it hard for Dave to work with him. Maybe she's angry because he constantly misses family events because of the demands of his job, and his attempt to put this right leads him to make a possibly fatal mistake in the investigation. Or, if we make the murder victim a child, the investigation might reawaken Dave's memories of his own daughter's death – a loss he has avoided facing by burying himself in his work, leaving his wife to grieve alone. Those three ideas don't just bring the two story strands closer together. They also create new problems for Dave, and the way he reacts to them will deepen the plot and build his character.

Story strands help with characterisation

In the previous example, we added the domestic strand to add variety to the story and the resultant depth to Dave's character was incidental. But often it is the desire to reveal something about a character that triggers the addition of a new strand in the first place. Rather than just telling the reader that your character is brave or kind or honest, you can add a storyline that shows that aspect of their personality in action.

Let's leave Dave solving the murder and switch to a young adult novel about character called Claire. She's in her final year at school and about to discover the secret that will shape her life. But as we reveal her destiny, it's vitally important that we let the readers know that she is terrified of drowning. We could just tell them, but that's not very interesting. We could reveal it in a dream which is only slightly better. Or we could add in a new story strand that reveals this aspect of Claire's character.

Suppose Claire is asked to go on a day out with friends. She accepts readily, especially as the group includes the boy she fancies. Then she realises that everyone is going swimming which she desperately doesn't want to do. (We won't tell the reader why yet. It often better to keep them guessing.) Claire tries but fails to come up with a plausible reason not to go so she deliberately forgets her swimming things to give her a way out. Unfortunately, one of the other girls has brought a spare bikini and insists on lending it to her. Claire reluctantly puts

it on and lurks safely on dry land until she goes too close to the edge of the pool and is pushed in. She panics so much when the water goes over her head that she doesn't realise she's not out of her depth. The boy she fancied encourages the others to laugh at her, but another young man she hadn't noticed before comes to her rescue and is very understanding. So we haven't just demonstrated Claire's fear of drowning. We've introduced a new character and moved the romantic strand of the story in a totally new direction.

If we wrote the drowning strand continuously, it would take the reader away from the main plot for a long time. To tie the book together, it's better to intersperse the various steps in this storyline with action from other strands of the book. When I'm trying to do this, I often write the individual steps of each strand on separate sticky notes and physically move them around, sorting them into different orders until I find which one works best.


Story strands can help pacing

The way you weave your story strands together can help you control the pace of your book. Moving back and forth between action-rich strands and more emotional, thoughtful ones can provide changes in tempo while still keeping the overall tension

in your book rising. A light-hearted strand can be particularly useful as the resultant switch back from laughter to tears or fear can heighten the emotional impact of what happens next.

It works well to have the strands come closer together as the book progresses and one way to do this is to reveal extra connections between the storylines. For example, in our detective story, the murderer could kidnap Dave's wife as the police close in which would link both story strands closely and let them both end together. Switching back and forth between these strands will keep the tension rising and keep readers turning the pages.

Of course, it's not always possible to make all your story strands finish simultaneously like this, especially if your main plot extends over a long period of time. It's fine to end some strands earlier provided you do it carefully. What you need to avoid is loose ends – they look messy when you're plaiting hair and annoy readers when you're writing a novel.

Be prepared to experiment a little as you weave your strands together to see which arrangement gives the effect you want. Doing that isn't easy – I often feel like a juggler trying to keep several balls in the air – but the effect can be so good that it's worth the effort. 

Troubleshooting subplots

It's as easy to make mistakes with subplots as it is with every other aspect of writing. Here are some tips to get you out of trouble.

Readers lose interest in your subplot

- Check there's a problem that readers will care about.
- If there isn't, put one in. Increase what's at stake if the problem isn't solved.
- Link the subplot more strongly to the main strand of the story.
- Replace this subplot with a better one.
- Take the subplot out completely.

Readers find it hard to follow the main storyline

- Return to the main story more often.
- Make the sections of the main story longer.
- Strengthen the links between the strands of the story.

The subplot is more interesting than the main plot and seems to be taking over the book.

- Strengthen the main plot.
- Switch the storylines so the subplot becomes the main plot.



DOUGLAS KENNEDY

The American saga writer shares his top five reads with **Judith Spelman**

Douglas Kennedy is an American writer, born and raised in Manhattan and educated at Bowdoin College and Trinity College, Dublin. In 1977 he co-founded a theatre company, Dublin Stage One, and later was put in charge of the Abbey Theatre's studio theatre, The Peacock, where he spent five years. It was during this time he began to write. He sold plays to RTE in Ireland and to Radio 4 in England and in 1983 he left his work at the Abbey Theatre to become a full-time writer. His first book, *Beyond the Pyramids: Travels in Egypt*, was published in 1988 and this was followed by two further travel books: *In God's Country: Travels in the Bible Belt* (1989) and *Chasing Mammon: Travels in Pursuit of Money* (1992).

His first novel, *The Dead Heart*, was published in 1994 and this was followed three years later by *The Big Picture* which was internationally acclaimed, published in 22 languages and sold over three million copies. Since then, his writing has gone from strength to strength and has sold more than 15 million books, with many turned into films. His work is particularly popular in France where he was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Douglas's new book, *The Great Wide Open*, is a door-stopper with a whopping 584 pages and still a gripping read.

Douglas Kennedy The Great Wide Open



REVOLUTIONARY ROAD, Richard Yates

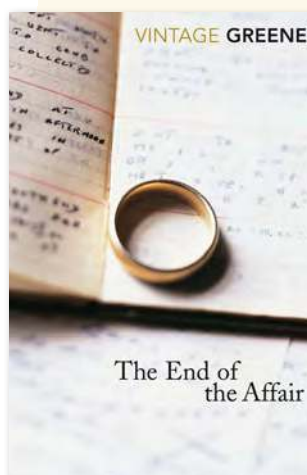
'Perhaps the great American post-war novel and one of the bleakest portraits of marriage ever encountered. A relentlessly honest, forensic, yet deeply humane exploration of self-entrapment and the way unhappiness becomes a weather system which is deeply hard to leave. Yates – himself a manic-depressive alcoholic – wrote with unflinching clarity about the suburban boom years of the Eisenhower era and the contempt that quickly creeps into a marriage and turns it toxic. An astonishingly truthful portrait of American materialism and conformity at its most corrosive.'



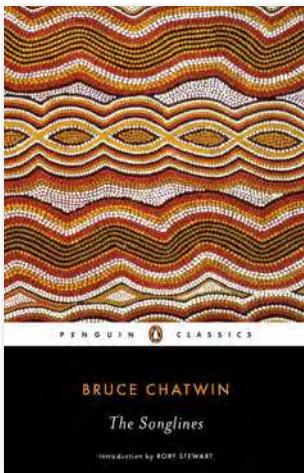
VINTAGE GREENE

THE END OF THE AFFAIR, Graham Greene

'The novel that made me want to become a writer and perhaps Greene's masterpiece (though there are several others – like *The Heart of the Matter* – which compete for that prize). A portrait of love as a form of obsessional possessiveness; a brilliantly spare examination of loneliness and the search for forgiveness in an unforgiving world; and a superbly atmospheric portrait of South London during the years of the Blitz. This is Greene at his most existential and metaphysically dense, for the novel also dares to play with the mysteries of faith and its interrelationship with sexual need. It remains an astonishing achievement.'



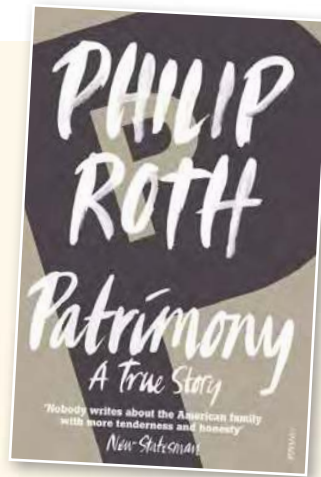
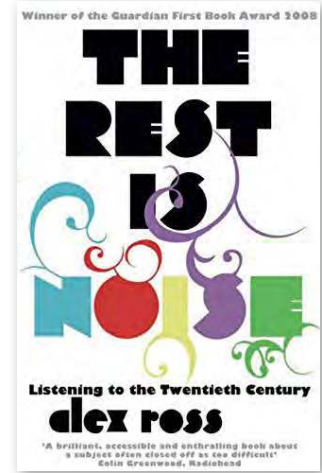
THE SONGLINES, Bruce Chatwin



'Chatwin's early death from AIDS robbed us of a hugely original, shape-shifting literary talent. In this singular, quirky account of a journey into the Australian bush to research Aboriginal songlines, Chatwin shows us how all travel can be, in the right hands, a theatre of ideas; a search for the continuum in the human experience as unearthed in that most formidable and vast of terrains: The Outback.'

THE REST IS NOISE, Alex Ross

'For a classical music obsessive like myself this is an essential book: an examination of the vast and crucial landmarks in 20th century music, as brilliantly surveyed by *The New Yorker's* gifted music critic. Erudite, historically compelling and seriously musicological, it is an epic exploration of every major creative musical movement from Mahler to minimalism. More tellingly, Ross tells the story of that most troubled century as seen in its wildly disparate, shifting musical output.'



PATRIMONY: A TRUE STORY, Philip Roth

'Roth's great non-fiction masterpiece; the story of his father framed at that juncture when, at the age of eighty-six, a brain tumour was about to end his life. Roth masterfully creates a remarkable portrait of a life that, seen from the outside, does not seem singular or remarkable, but which Roth turns into something deeply emblematic about the last American century. Like all of Roth it is a literary tour-de-force that also serves as a reminder that there is no such thing as "ordinary life".'

The *Great Wide Open* is a bildungsroman – a novel of personal development; a big ambitious coming of age story set between 1971-1985, following a young American woman from adolescence to the cusp of thirty-dom as she negotiates a family riddled with internecine rivalries (like all families) and a society in the midst of great upheaval and transition. The culture wars that so define America today are everywhere in this novel. And as this is the eighth time I have written as a woman narrator... well I never think "as a woman". I just get myself deep into the psyche of my narrator and see the world from her viewpoint and wing it from there.

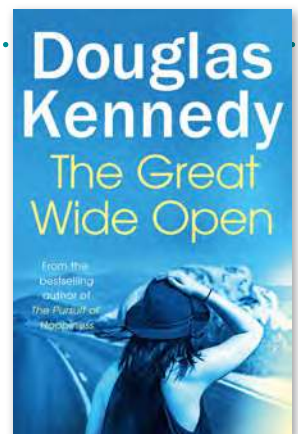
'I never structure my novels in advance, never plot anything, never do character flow charts or any of that prescriptive writing course stuff. *The Great Wide Open* was my thirteenth novel. The original manuscript was 1,200 pages long. It was written in fifteen months. When I get on a narrative roll, I write six days a week and I write fast. When it comes to that question, "how do you do it?" I fully embrace that Somerset Maugham statement: "There are five rules for writing a novel... and nobody knows what they are".

'I am an intensely disciplined writer – in the sense that even if I have flu (as I do right now) or am hungover or feeling melancholic or full of the worst sort of doubt about the words on the page, I

carry on writing. Discipline is crucial to the writing process. And whereas some writers have a soundproof room or some semi-sacred enclave to which they retreat, I can (and do) write everywhere: cafes, bars, the underground, trains, planes. I actually finished my first novel, *The Dead Heart*, with my then one-year old son, Max, under my desk.

'I don't care how pressured or complex your life happens to be – if you want to write you will write. And do remember this: nobody cares if you get the damn book written or not. Another thought worth considering: writing is a confidence trick you play on yourself. Whatever befalls you, whatever *merde* you encounter... it is all material. And always understand this crucial truth: we all read to remember that we are not alone.'

The Great Wide Open by Douglas Kennedy is published by Hutchinson, price £20 hardback



CELEBRITY

Under the Microscope

James McCreet examines the beginning of Lewis Carroll's strange classic, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank,¹ and of having nothing to do:² once or twice she had peeped³ into the book her sister was reading,⁴ but it had no pictures or conversations in it,⁵ 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice 'without pictures or conversations?'⁶

So she was considering in her own mind⁷ (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid),⁸ whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies,⁹ when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.¹⁰

There was nothing so VERY remarkable in that;¹¹ nor did Alice think it so VERY much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself,¹² 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!' (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural);¹³ but when the Rabbit actually TOOK A WATCH OUT OF ITS WAISTCOAT-POCKET,¹⁴ and looked at it, and then hurried on,¹⁵ Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it,¹⁶ and burning with curiosity,¹⁷ she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.¹⁸

In another moment down went Alice after it,¹⁹ never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.²⁰

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way,²¹ and then dipped suddenly²² down, so suddenly²³ that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself.²⁴

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a mathematician, photographer, deacon and children's writer better known by his pen-name, Lewis Carroll. His best-known books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, are considered two of the best examples of the literary nonsense genre.



1 This is not even a complete sentence. Nor is it remotely complicated. But look how much information it conveys. Our main character is called Alice; she is sitting on a riverbank beside her sister and she is frustrated. By implication, she is different and somehow special.

2 Note that Alice is bored for two reasons: being with her sister and having nothing to do. The former – being mentioned first – seems to be the primary cause of her frustration. The fact that the sister is not worthy of a name subtly tells us that the narrator is on Alice's side.

3 The choice of verb ('peeped' rather than 'glanced') reveals something more about the sororial relationship. Is Alice's sister older and perhaps a little fierce? It also tells us that Alice is sly and mischievous.

4 A further visual detail that allows the reader to picture the scene.

5 The 'but' tells us Alice's criteria for a book being interesting, and further establishes her character.

6 We might think that the end of this sentence/paragraph stresses the point excessively and shows the author's

hand too obviously. It was already clear what Alice thought. Is it because this is self-consciously a story being told – as the 'original' was told to a young Alice Liddell on a boat trip – and is for children, who may have needed some narrative pointers? Or is Carroll afraid the reader might have missed the point?

7 Again, we might ask why it's necessary to say 'in her own mind'. Where else might she be considering it? Perhaps Carroll is trying to reinforce her wilful and independent way of thinking.

8 Carroll uses the parentheses as a technique to enter Alice's thoughts while keeping his storyteller role. The word 'stupid' is used here with its more archaic meaning of dull, or drugged or bored.

9 The example tells us more about Alice, for whom picking – but not connecting – daisies is a chore. We're beginning to understand that she's different and likes different things.

10 The word 'suddenly' seems a little too insistent. Moreover, it's not especially accurate, since the rabbit is heard talking to itself and stops to check its watch. The capitals hint that this is not just any rabbit.

11 The capitalisation here seems to capture Alice's intonation – a subtler way of handing her voice than telling us what she thought.

12 The fact of her not finding the talking rabbit unusual reinforces what we've so far seen of her character and begins to establish a tale that will be increasingly surreal.

13 There are a number of narrative mechanisms at work here. Carroll uses parentheses, straightforward telling, and more subtle techniques (those capitalised words) to evoke Alice's perspective, but their multiplicity threatens to muddy the point of view. Here, the chronological leap to a later time and Alice's reflection is amusing enough, but also looks like an authorial justification for the less credulous reader.

14 The capitals again work well to show Alice's amazement. It also fuels the growing sense of absurdity and surrealism – there was no previous mention of the pink-eyed rabbit wearing a waistcoat.

15 The double 'and' is a classic technique of simple storytelling.

16 The surrealism is wonderfully underlined when Alice finds the waistcoat and watch remarkable but not the fact that the rabbit was speaking.

17 Everything in her behaviour so far has shown her obvious curiosity, so why mention it explicitly here?

18 Only a pedant would remark that she previously had insufficient energy to pick daisies but is now ready to sprint across the field. More important is the fact that the rabbit hole is described as large. If it weren't, she wouldn't be able to follow. As with point 13, this looks like Carroll the literal-minded lecturer and mathematician making sure he explains the possibilities of what seems impossible.

19 'In another moment', like the 'so' that starts the second paragraph or the 'suddenly' of number 10, is an unnecessary connector, as if Carroll is

self-conscious about connecting thoughts and scenes.

20 The authorial voice tells us something that Alice didn't think, which divides the reader's attention between Alice and the telling of her story

21 An important visual detail. The 'tunnel' gives us some sense of the scale and implies that Alice didn't have to crawl.

22 Another 'suddenly'.

23 And another. As many writers will agree, the word is not especially effective at expressing suddenness because as an adverb it's modifying something else. Better simply to express what happens and let the suddenness be obvious. Which sentence works better: "Suddenly, the door opened" or "The door jerked open"?

24 A rather wordy way of saying that she fell.

In summary

At the risk of committing sacrilege, I have to conclude that the opening to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is not as amazing as perhaps we might expect. It's a combination of sharp and clever writing with some more amateur narrative technique. Let's consider the evidence.

Carroll was not a professional writer. He was a mathematician whose lifetime authorial output might amount to an average-sized novel. His genius was his playful and absurd imagination – his capacity to spin a story that could enchant children across the centuries. His wordplay was hugely creative, but he was no master of prose.

In this opening section, we see a few examples of him over-explaining or trying to second-guess the reader – a habit that has the contrary effect by drawing our attention to him and thus away from the story. For example, we'd normally expect a writer to use sentence length to manage pace and focus, but that third paragraph is a single sentence of 141 words and multiple clauses. The rambling nature of it minimises the impact of its content.

It's clear from the excerpt that Carroll hadn't considered in advance how he was going to handle the narrative perspective, hence the multiple ways of expressing the action and Alice's responses to it. These veer between the effectively subtle (those capitals) and apparent overstatement (see point 6). There's a sense of his creativity as a storyteller being at war with his hyper-logical mind. He can't relax into the fabulism of his tale. He is not immediately comfortable as an author.

Still, it's necessary to remember two things. The first is that this is a story intended for one child in particular (Alice Liddell) and later for children in general. They don't worry too much about the repetition of 'suddenly' or the 'and then' style of storytelling. They don't get hung up on narrative perspective.

There's also the question of period. The idea of free-indirect speech (of which there are indications here) was still to be understood, codified or named in 1865. It's unfair to retroactively apply a century and a half of literary theory to a mathematician's children's book. Of its time, it was more acceptable in terms of technique than it may be now (see also Jane Austen's punctuation or Daniel Defoe's grammar).

Alice has remained relevant for so long because it is brilliant. The ideas and the character shine. The prose, less so.



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Take the plunge or throw in the towel?



Writing Magazine is nothing if not inspirational, with its wealth of stories about writers who got there in the end. In *Talk It Over*, you have often given advice about persevering and keeping the faith, despite rejections and poor sales, the message being that if we wait long enough, success will come. What I would like to ask is: what if it doesn't? At what point does one either give up or do something drastic? I am in my sixties and still working in a demanding job, so I do not have time on my side in any respect. I sometimes think I should take early retirement and have one last big push – I have been placed in some short story competitions but my dream is to sell a novel – but if I failed and made no money, this might have financial implications for the rest of my life. I have discussed this with two friends. One said I would regret it if I didn't have a go at writing full-time and the other said I'd be an idiot not to maximise my pension. What do you think?

LOUISE MAYNE
Stoke-on-Trent

I think, Louise, that this is a very real dilemma. It is hard to throw your all into a novel when juggling the demands of a full-time job, and it is very scary – not to say downright ill-advised – to give up all paid employment for a dream that may not come to pass.

The reality is that statistically, very few writers make a proper living out of their work. The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) carried out a survey of 5,500 writers last year and the results made for a sobering read.

They showed that median earnings for professional writers have dropped by 42% since 2005 and are now well under the minimum wage. Only 13% of professional writers were found to be living on writing income alone.

This state of affairs has been widely criticised, with many leading authors calling on the publishing industry to share a greater proportion of its profits with those at the hard-graft end of the process, and the Society of Authors mounting a campaign, but I cannot see it changing any time soon.

I could not therefore, in all conscience, advise you to give

Jane Wenham Jones has wise words for a writer wondering whether to follow her dream of publication or put her financial future first

up work to write a novel unless you were very sure you could survive by other means.

Having said that, people do!

Celia Anderson was a teacher when she first got published and knows exactly how hard it is to fit in writing around work. 'For years I would write feverishly in the holidays,' she says, 'but in term time, planning, marking and after school activities swallowed up all my waking hours.' Timing, she says, is everything. 'When to wait patiently and when to act, that's the problem. Lack of patience has been a constant bugbear for me.' Celia did finally get published and says she 'celebrated in a big way'. She explains: 'The waiting was over at last. Ha! It was only just beginning. By the fourth book, all of them digital and with two different publishers, it dawned on me that waiting for readers to happen on my books and doing a bit of a Facebook/Twitter flurry every now and again wasn't anywhere near enough.'

Celia was now 58, and an assistant head. Still her job was taking any free time she might have had for publicising the books. 'It was time for the waiting to be tackled head on,' she recalls. 'I took the plunge, gave in my notice and dived into the mad, needle-in-a-haystack world of finding an agent.'

The agent she found got Celia a two-book deal with Harper Fiction. The first novel, *59 Memory Lane*, will be published in July. 'Two years on, I'm glad I waited,' says Celia. 'My wonderful agent has made a huge difference and having time and space to write is bliss. I only got the agent and bigger book deal once my brain wasn't taken up with work stuff and extra-curricular events. I keep a toe in the water by running two kids' clubs but I have never regretted taking

early retirement.'

So Celia had a happy ending, but would giving up work do the same for you? I could blind you with platitudes – about money not being everything, and only regretting the things we don't do, and personal fulfilment being high on the priority list – but I do know it is very hard to be creative, or feel fulfilled, when you are worrying about the gas bill. You have shown you can write, by winning prizes for your short stories, but it remains a jungle out there when it comes to getting your novel to shine from the slushpile.

So I am wondering if you could compromise and have that big push without jeopardising your financial future? Would it be possible to do a four-day week? When I first started writing I had a small baby and I managed to negotiate one day a week free when my mother took on the childcare and I wrote solidly for those few precious hours. Having a small window in which to perform can really focus the mind. I produced so many more words during that period than I do now!

If this is impossible, could you pledge to get up an hour or two earlier and write every day? Carve out Sundays as writing time to the exclusion of all else? If you can get a manuscript finished and are lucky enough to get a publishing deal, you can then make a decision on your working life based on whatever proverbial bird you have in your hand, rather than what might be lurking in the bush.

Finally, remember that sixty is nothing these days. If you wait for the optimum time pension-wise, you could still be published in your seventies, eighties and beyond. Whatever you decide, I wish you luck. **WM**

If you
have a question
you would like Jane to
consider, email jane@janewenham-jones.com



Helpline

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Email your queries to Diana (please include hometown details) at: diana@dianacambridge.co.uk or send them to: Helpline, *Writing Magazine*, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD. She will answer as many letters as she can on the page, but regrets that she cannot enter into individual correspondence. Publication of answers may take several months. Helpline cannot personally answer queries such as where to offer work, or comment on manuscripts, which you are asked not to send.

Q I have spent the past year working on a horror novel and I'm satisfied that it is now as perfect as it can possibly be. However, it is only around 40,000 words long. I am well aware that this is considerably shorter than the expected length of a novel for adults but I feel that in working on it further I would just be adding unnecessary padding. I'd like to know if I can realistically market it to agents and publishers just as it is. Would it qualify as a novella, and do agents consider novellas saleable?

RHYDDERCH WILSON
Swansea

A From all I've heard lately, the novella is making quite the comeback! Partly because it's quick to read on Kindle – and because readers are looking for short, satisfying reads. Waterstones branches, for example, have a desk of 'short reads' in most of their shops.

A word count of 40,000 would qualify as a novella. One famous novella writer is Muriel Spark, and Albert Camus' celebrated work *The Outsider* has only 116 pages. As always, I suggest entering a chapter and a synopsis to writing competitions before embarking on agents and publishers. When you do, check their sites – they'll let you know if they are specifically looking for novellas, or not looking for them.

Q So far I have written one crime novel and twenty historical novels. They've been published in the UK, USA and Israel. Normally it is easy for me to find a topic and write on it, but suddenly I find I've run out of steam and can't get cracking on anything new. I've got the outline of a Shakespeare murder mystery all mapped out (over 1,000 word plan) but can't seem to go forward despite my love of the Bard. Has the well dried up?

DAVID LAWRENCE-YOUNG
Jerusalem, Israel

A No easy answer – but the well certainly has not dried up! If you look at what you have achieved, it's huge, and you can do it again. Perhaps what you need is a change of scene, a trip, a sort of well-deserved sabbatical. If you were working in an office – and had been there a long time – a sabbatical might be reasonable, if unpaid. Try not thinking about your next project. At some point you will get bored with not thinking about it, and be itching to start writing again. I believe most, maybe all, writers go through this at some point. The 'so what?' view of life can clobber us all sometimes, but the return of energy and enthusiasm always follows, eventually. Hide your outline for now, take a trip or do something new, not connected with words – and when you're ready, you'll find the story is ready for you. Your talent is not in dispute.

Q Have you noticed how complicated some competition instructions are? It's as though the people who set the competitions are over-anxious to make sure that entrants completely understand the rules yet they are failing miserably. At times, it is terribly confusing.

THEO KILPATRICK
Sherborne, Dorset

A I have commented on badly-written competition rules several times. Organisers can set a poor standard for writing. Submission guidelines and rules need to be crystal-clear, succinct and written in short sentences. The vital facts to include are:

Deadline (date, year and time – midnight? Noon? Or any time on the final day?)

Where to put author's details – and where to put the title of the submission.

Competition rule-writers need to be very clear about this – and don't talk about 'uploading documents' unless you say which documents to upload. Are there two: author details and submission? Or only one – submission – with author details taken from the body of the email? Does the entrant pay the fee before or after submission? All this should be conveyed in short, clear sentences, not in long, rambling and ambiguous ones. Plus, for puzzled entrants – a contact email number for the competition – not a website contact form which has to be submitted, may get lost or never read, or, most likely, may not work. Keep things simple and clear, please. The major puzzle for submissions is where to put the personal details. Putting them in the wrong place may mean being disqualified. Competition organisers may think everything is 'obvious' – it may well be, to them.

Q I am looking to get representation with an agent and had a question regarding how many to contact at one time? Is it the 'done thing' to only contact one at a time and await their response before moving on to another on your target list, or is it deemed acceptable to contact a few at once? If I did contact two or three at the same time, should I tell them I am doing so?

FIONA HARDING
Ross on Wye, Herefordshire

A There are 2,000 agents in the UK. The thing to remember is that they are working for you, and not the other way round. If you're taken on, they'll be earning money from your work (agreed the best agents do a marvellous service for you... that's their job). Being an agent requires a huge amount of talent and business acumen. But you have every right to consider a few agents, shop around, meet them if at all possible (I'd say it was essential) and make your own decision. I see no reason why you shouldn't contact several at a time – they can take ages to reply, so it makes sense to do that.

Remember they have many submissions: securing an agent is competitive. No, there's no need to tell them you're contacting several agents. They'll assume that.



Make a drama out of it

Explore your inner drama queen with **Margaret James**
to give your fiction the best chance of engaging readers' attention

I'm not writing drama, I'm writing fiction.'
Actually, dear creative writing student who told me this a year or two ago, if you are writing fiction you really ought to be writing drama. But I'll let you off because I know you meant you were writing a story in prose to be read, rather than a play to be performed.

What else is drama, then, if it's not a play?

It's a term that is sometimes debased nowadays. Expressions such as *drama queen*, meaning a woman (or even a man) who is an attention-seeking over-reactor, don't do it any favours. Ditto the accusation that so-and-so makes a drama out of the slightest little thing. But its original definition is merely to act or to do, and that's what all fiction needs – action of some kind with which to engage the reader's attention and to encourage this reader to ask what will happen next.

All stories, whether they are in the form of plays, novels, films or even football matches, need to get the people being told the story to ask questions and to expect developments. They need to have beginnings, middles and ends, or – in the case of football matches – kick offs, half times and final scores.

A traditional novel is similar in structure to a football match. The kick-off is when a central character is challenged in some way. But in a novel half time is not when everyone has a breather: it's when something goes unexpectedly wrong (or perhaps unexpectedly right) and the central character(s) need(s)

to face a new challenge or even a range of challenges. The final score is when the reader learns whether or not the central character(s) got what he, she or they wanted or deserved.

But not all the main characters in all novels need to run around like footballers physically exerting themselves, do they? Of course not, don't worry. The central protagonists of Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* exemplify two extremes of personality: a flamboyant extrovert and a timid introvert, the first a magician who is guided by instinct and travels to Portugal and Italy in the course of his exciting career, the second someone who has learned almost everything he knows from books and hates being away from home.

So drama doesn't always need to involve physical action. It can be about emotional action, too. Sometimes, readers reviewing a novel complain that nothing happened. But something probably did, in the form of emotional progress, and this is what took the action forward, even if nobody discovered a lost city or an Anglo-Saxon hoard.


I'm sometimes asked about the difference between literary and genre fiction – is there any real difference, or do literary novelists just use prettier words and more convoluted sentence structures? I feel that in literary fiction there might not need to be so much physical running around from A to B because the characters can be allowed to go on purely emotional journeys and readers of literary fiction won't usually grumble.

I once had a student who refused to read the work of Virginia Woolf on the grounds that nothing ever happened, and therefore the novels were boring. Well, okay, not much happens in the way of finding stolen diamonds or catching criminals. But there's masses of emotional action, which certainly satisfies this author's many admirers. Virginia Woolf's fiction takes emotional risks and strives – most readers would say successfully – to tell the truth about human nature. But clearly this isn't enough for some: <https://writ.rs/mrsdalloway>

Personally, I feel the very best stories transcend genre, defy categorisation, and offer us both kinds of action or – if you prefer – drama. Some examples of this include *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which focuses on the emotional development of its child narrator and also features the high drama of a court case in which justice is seen not to prevail, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which paints a compelling portrait of an entire society in crisis and literally on the move, and *Frankenstein*, which was ground-breaking in many ways, structurally, emotionally and action-wise. But you will be able to think of many more.

I must admit I like to find at least some physical running-around in fiction, and I love a good adventure story in which lost cities do get found, and crime fiction in which the bad guy does get caught. Since crime is currently outselling every other kind of fiction, it must be doing something right, or rather doing lots of things right. Most crime fiction certainly offers readers plenty of physical action, but it also offers emotional action too, in the form of the character development of its central protagonists. As we read through a series, we get to know Morse, Holmes, Marple, Poirot, Ramotswa and Wimsey as people, as well as crime fighters and problem solvers. The success of the stories about them must be down to the appeal of the characters themselves and their emotional journeys as well as to the intrigue of the mysteries which they solve.

The most common complaint from readers reviewing novels is probably 'I didn't care about the characters', closely followed by 'nothing much happened'. I feel this is basically the same kind of criticism, meaning there wasn't enough drama. Readers don't tend to care about characters who have nothing to learn and nowhere to go in an emotional sense. Most readers also like characters to do things in a physical sense. But I would like to suggest that in fiction emotional drama is perhaps more important than physical drama, because before you tell the reader what happens to your characters, and what they do, you'll need to get your readers to care about them and get emotionally involved with them.

I cared about the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* and that's probably why I don't find this classic novel boring at all. 

NOW TRY THIS

Look at your current work-in-progress and try to decide if enough is happening, preferably in both the physical and emotional sense, or at least in one of them. What do your central characters want and are they likely to get it?



I wish I'd known...

with Jeevani Charika



It took me over three years to write my first novel. As I neared the end of it, I worried that it would be the only one I'd ever write. What if that was my one and only idea? Where do you get ideas from?


'As a bright-eyed newbie, I resisted learning story structure. I felt it somehow constrained inspiration.

'Then I joined the Romantic Novelists' Association and met people who regularly wrote a book a year (at least). I figured I could try to do the same. But what would I write about? In the end, I did the very simple thing of writing down things that I was even vaguely interested in and thinking about them until an idea developed. That was how I learned that ideas don't need to come to you fully formed.

'Your life experience is lying around in your brain like twigs in a forest. You just have to gather it into heaps and find one thing, however tiny, that can light a spark. That spark will leap from twig to twig, setting each one alight until they join up in one glorious fire.

'You have to be exceptionally lucky to find a story that comes to you fully formed. Most ideas have to be developed. Learning about three-act story structure and character arcs and other elements of plot helped enormously in this.

'Knowing the rules of story helped me corral the snippets of information and work them into a usable whole. I write a book a year now.

'I spent a lot of time reading craft books. I still do. It was and remains a great investment. If I'd realised the value of story structure at the start, I would have saved myself several years of fretting.' 



The eyes have it

Look into character creation in this writing group exercise from **Julie Phillips**

It is said that the eyes are the window to our soul. They are also the window to our characters. This month's workshop is a series of activities that will help us to take a closer look at our characters by exploring, from their perspective, the world we as writers have created for them, and how to translate what our character sees and experiences on to the page.

We all see things differently. From the moment we are born, through a process of nature and nurture, we are exposed to different environments and experiences. No two people's experiences will be the same and this lends itself to the richness and diversity of life. With this in mind, when trying to engage the reader, writers try to write about things that will resonate with their readers. It's why it's important for writers to identify their readership early in the writing process so they know who they are writing for and can tailor their writing to them.

For the first activity, give the group images of famous people's eyes. See how many they can identify. For the ones they get right, what was it about the eyes that made them so distinctive? For the ones they got wrong, once it was revealed who the eyes belong to, did they then, on taking another look at the eyes, realise who it was?

For a bit of fun, you could also do this activity using images of your group members' eyes. It would be interesting to see if anyone could be identified by their eyes alone. Quite often, if we are asked what colour eyes someone has, we can't remember, so paying attention to the eyes can bring life to our writing.

Next, distribute amongst the group pictures of different people's eyes – just the eyes, no complete faces. Then ask them to write a couple of paragraphs describing the eyes and the kind of person

they might belong to. Feedback to the rest of the group, including a discussion on what it was about the eyes that led them to those conclusions. Then write another paragraph to develop their previous notes into a character, writing either a scene from a short story or novel, or the first verse of a poem.

Next, ask them to go and sit next to someone else in the room and read each other's work. Then write another paragraph or two, or verse, together incorporating both characters. The scene or verse must make reference to the characters' eyes. What were the challenges of writing about eyes and how did they make use of the notes they made on the initial images of the eyes? What information about the eyes was useful to make the scene work?

Perhaps it was the expression the eyes portrayed or their colour. Could they guess the age of the person the eyes belonged to? Was the person wearing glasses or contact lenses? People look quite different when they take their glasses off or put them on. Could the fact that the character wore glasses be integral to the plot of the scene?

When the group is ready, ask them to read out some of their work, alongside their observations of the process. Did the group think the writing was effective or do they have any ideas for improvements?

Next ask the group to get into the

heads of their character and behind their eyes. Now rewrite the scene as if they were that character. What do they see? How does what they see make them feel?

Finally, in pairs, with one partner blindfolded, the other person hands them an object to hold. The blindfolded person then describes what they feel and what they think the item is. Then swap over.

What is it like to describe something you can't see and are reliant on touch alone to identify?

When one of our senses is incapacitated, our other senses are heightened. The purpose of this activity is to enable the group to use their other senses to fill in the gaps of what they can't see. Feedback to the whole group about what they noticed about their descriptions of what they were holding in their hands. Were they accurate? What was missing?

Now that they can see the object what could they add to the description? This helps the writer to make their descriptions rounder and full.

Eyes can convey so much information. They can show a myriad of emotions, be deceptive or show the truth. A glance, a stare, a leer, avoiding eye contact, blinking, all tell us something about the person. A look can give nothing or everything away.

A raised eyebrow, a wink, squinting, a sparkle in the eye and wrinkles, can tell us a lot about a person and when included in our writing lends the piece that extra bit of something special. **Ww**





CIRCLES' ROUNDUP

If your writing group would like to feature here, whether you need new members, have an event to publicise or to suggest tips for other groups, email Tina Jackson, tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Toosey Literary Circle



We are a small writing group situated in one of Essex's most historical villages, St Osyth, *writes Sarah Banham*.

St Osyth is affectionately nicknamed by locals as 'Toosey', which is why, I named us 'Toosey Literary Circle: Because everyone's writing deserves some TLC'.

We meet monthly at a local café and will be celebrating our fourth birthday this year. Members come and go throughout time but two of our original members remain, Elaine Carlo and Rosemary Foord. We also have Gerald Hornsby, Sthiranaga, Tiffany Shand and Sue Long. Our newest member is David Evans. Half of us already have established literary careers under our belts while the other half are quickly learning about the excitement creative writing can bring.

We are friendly, informal and respectful with critique. We always have a giggle each month and end each session with any good news that we've encountered during the previous month – that way we are sure to leave with a smile on our face. We each set 'homework' which we read aloud the following month and accept that homework may be up to 500 words and in any genre. Any work that particularly stands out is published in the *Parish Publication* so everyone has an opportunity to shine publicly.

'Our emphasis is on enjoyment with creative writing. If anyone in the Tendring area wants to join us, please contact sarah@loveofbooks.co.uk for details.'

Norwich Forum Writers



In 2012, Norwich became England's first UNESCO City of Literature, *writes Gillian Wilson*.

This success has created a buzz amongst local writers and aspiring writers alike.

One small, friendly writers' group meets in the Millennium library situated within The Norwich Forum. This inspiring building, opposite the magnificent church of St Peter Mancroft, is easily accessible to all. Fortnightly meetings take place on a Friday morning from 10.30 until 12; and participation is free. The group is led by volunteer coordinator Anthony Rosie who works tirelessly to produce an interesting and varied programme of activities.

In each session, we work on a chosen topic which has included historical writing, plot development, scriptwriting and aspects of poetry. Following group discussions, with many references to published works, both contemporary and classic, we spend 20-30 minutes writing a short piece related to the week's selected theme. Many are happy to share their ideas or their writing with the rest of the group but there is no pressure to do so.

Earlier this year, we decided that we would like to produce an anthology of members' work. We want it to showcase the inclusive ethos of our group. This is helping us to develop our skills in relation to the critical appraisal of both our own work and that of others; giving and receiving constructive feedback.

If you have ever wondered if you can write, here is a safe, encouraging and free way to find out. We look forward to meeting you.

Contact email: anthonyrosie@gmail.com



SUBSCRIBER SPOTLIGHT

Share your writing success stories. If you subscribe to *Writing Magazine* and would like to feature here, email Tina Jackson, tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk

A thrilling debut

'I'm thrilled to announce the publication of my debut novel, *The Dark Place*, and it's the best feeling in the world,' writes subscriber Stephanie Rogers.

'It's a thriller about a couple whose daughter commits suicide, leaving behind a toddler son.

It's the story of them trying to find out why, with no clues she was unhappy. The more they discover, the less they feel they knew her. It asks the question: how well do we really know those we love? The book is described as "deliciously dark and twisty" by Manatee Books, my publisher.

'I started writing about eight years ago when I did a Writers' Bureau creative writing course, which I loved. After that, I was bitten by the writing bug. I wrote a novel, mainly for the practise, which will forever stay at the back of the drawer where it rightly belongs. I've written a lot of short stories and had two of them published in *Take A Break's Fiction Feast*. And, of course, I've had the many rejections we all face, along the way.

'Novels are where my heart lies and I've now written five in total. *The Dark Place* is the first one to be published. It's available on Amazon in both Kindle and paperback, and holding the paperback in my hands for the first time was beyond words. I heard about Manatee Books in Writers' News and decided to submit to them. Fortunately, they loved the story as much as I did. The whole editing process was brilliant and I've enjoyed working with them immensely.

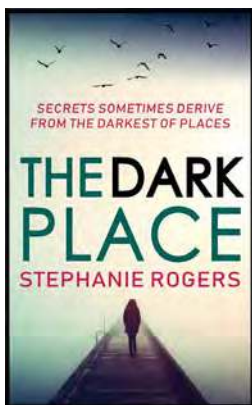
'I have finished another two thrillers and am hoping to have a second book out in the not-too-distant future. I'm



hard at work now on book number six while watering the seed for book seven at the same time. All my books so far are standalones but I would love to write a series one day if I can find the right character and story. I've written a YA fantasy and would love to branch out into children's one day.

'My mantra is never give up and never stop learning. And I won't.'

Website: <http://steph2rogers.wixsite.com/stephanie-rogers>



Platform for odd voices

'My first year as a subscriber to *Writing Magazine* has been one of immense growth,' writes subscriber KC Finn.

'I've been a published writer for the last six years, working with indie presses, small publishers and in self-publishing, and have won several awards for my books over that time. Just when I thought I had writing down, *Writing Magazine* opened me up to even more fantastic competition opportunities. I travelled to Canterbury to take third place in an international writing contest thanks to seeing the ad in *WM*, I won *WM's* mid-story sentence contest for 2018 and have been delighted to receive five other shortlisted stories and poems in the last twelve months.

'This immense boost in confidence encouraged me take the reins with my business partner Kell Cowley, and we successfully launched our own publishing label in November 2018: Odd Voice Out. Providing a bookshelf for the offbeat, Odd Voice Out is an independent literary press which publishes YA and crossover stories. Our genre-bending books take contemporary social and political themes and explore them through a range of historical, futuristic, surreal and supernatural settings. Our diverse young heroes are never your typical leading guys and girls, but are flawed insecure misfits struggling with everything from racial and sexual identity, body issues, disabilities, mental health and worst of all, being teenagers growing up in worlds gone mad.

'We recently completed a successful opening fundraiser and enjoyed a lively launch party at the Live Rooms in our hometown of Chester, gaining some local media attention. OVO intends to tour local events and festivals, as well as schools, in the coming months, culminating in our presentation at YALC 2019 in London next summer. I'm delighted to see my brand new urban horror novel *Fallow Heart* available on Amazon Kindle, and in gorgeous hardback and paperback formats with our adorable OVO owl logo on the spine.



'*Fallow Heart* is the story of Lorelai Blake, a self-conscious, overweight seventeen-year-old who discovers that a demon has pierced her heart, sparking an incredible transformation. Sleepwalking, fits of rage and impossible strength force Lori to accept that part of her is no longer human.'

Website: <http://oddvoiceout.com/>



Other days, other times

'My four most recent books were produced by a conventional publisher which has now ceased trading, and so I have decided to tackle the next one by self-publishing,' writes subscriber John Grimson.

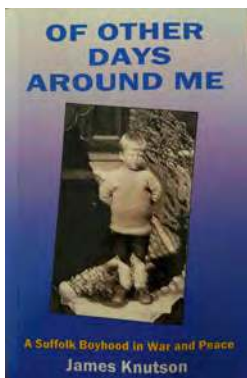


'Of Other Days Around Me is a part-fictionalised memoir of a Suffolk boyhood in war and peace and is written under the pseudonym of James Knutson.

"Nutty" Knutson was born in 1934, of working-class parents, in a coastal town which had been one of the principal ports in the North Sea herring fishery. By the time he was old enough to notice such things, the town was being transformed from a fishing port into a naval base on the approach to World War II.

'During the ensuing six years, Nutty, always the inveterate wanderer, would roam the town and its surroundings, witnessing the accelerating changes, as well as dodging the descending bombs and welcoming the eventual arrival of the United States Army Air Force.

'Following the end of hostilities, his schooling had reached the stage where he was destined to sit the feared 11-plus examination to determine which type of secondary school he should attend. In 1951, after five years at a secondary modern and a further two at the local technical college, he left home to embark on a course of 'social mobility' – long before we had ever heard of that term. This is Nutty's account of those years and is available on Amazon as a paperback or ebook.'



Invincible Vincent!

'My path to book publication has been a long and winding road,' writes subscriber Vincent Moran.

'Having penned five novels, without submissions anywhere, and thus languishing unpublished in a bottom drawer in fear and trembling, I finally took the giant leap and approached one Dominic Taylor who runs a publishing house in Limerick Ireland, and asked him if he'd be interested in publishing my novel *Gabriel's Lark*, since the book was Limerick based, even if its main character would traverse several countries on a flight of fancy.

'The novel came out of hiding in December, and found a prominent place in a leading bookstore after Dominic gave me the green light. Returning to Limerick (of *Angela's Ashes* fame) for the launch, I became a somewhat reluctant celebrity, being hailed for my previous campaigning journalism through which, among other things, led to the installation of ramps for disabled people across the city.

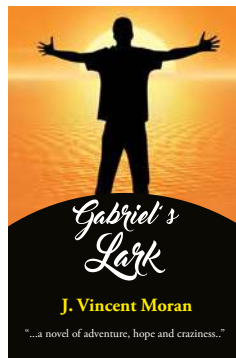
'My route to fiction was accidental. Having worked for several years in journalism internationally, I found myself dabbling in other genres while attending City University of New York. Along the way I managed to scoop all of the English department's top prizes, including journalism (of course!), literary criticism, playwriting, poetry and prose fiction, notably The Edgar Allan Poe Prize. For my pains I was dubbed a "jack of all writing trades," and given the Major Outstanding Writer Award.

'Later at the University of Kent in Canterbury for a Master's degree by research and thesis (comparative analysis of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw), I would win The Sir William Golding Prize for the short story *Hero of Halcyon Days*.

'The novel? Craving a life beyond domestic drudgery, Gabriel cuts loose to pursue a devil-may-care existence in Germany, England, Greece and Denmark which, almost inevitably, descends into chaos, forcing him to confront the responsibilities he ran away from in Ireland, his freedom lost, family tragedy looming. Its escapist theme, peppered with drama and humour, shows that the grass is not always greener over woolly horizons, and that in Gabriel's case it might well have been greener closer to home.

'It's currently available on:

www.limerickwriterscentre.com.'



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Horror in disguise

'When I came runner up the 2012 *Writing Magazine's* annual ghost story competition, I realised there are people out there interested in my words,' writes subscriber Kevin Grover.

'After years of writing, I was encouraged to push myself to complete a novel. So in 2015 I self-published *Father's Song*, a horror novel about the dark origins of nursery rhymes. Although sales were disappointing, I pushed on and released my second novel in 2016, then my third in 2017. But they were not selling well.

'When people asked what genre my books are, I'd tell them horror. Then their faces would turn to horror and they'd utter the usual, "I don't like horror." I noticed a lack of horror in shops and began to take note of popular titles. I found the crime thriller was very popular with books like *Girl on the Train*. In fact, most titles with Girl were popular, showing people were reading thrillers with a strong female character. I began reading, and enjoying, a wide range of UK authors writing thrillers from Mark Edwards to Lisa Jewell.

'I looked at my fourth completed novel and decided I'd rewrite it, take out a lot of the horror and make it more of a whodunnit. There's still a paranormal element in there, but it's a lot more subtle than the first draft. I also switched the lead from male to female and pushed the mystery more.

'So in 2019 I released *Dead Again*, the story of a murdered girl who mysteriously returns to life a year after her murder and tries to work out who her killer is. I marketed this as a crime thriller and despite the fact it's about a woman coming back to life, it's sold much better than my previous horror titles. I've had people contact me and tell me they're enjoying the book, and trying to guess the killer from the list of suspects.

'This time around I paid for an editor to go over the novel, and I've been looking into marketing a lot more. I'm hoping to build on the success of *Dead Again* and I'm already concentrating on my next book.

'I've found the biggest struggle is getting reviews on Amazon, but I'm hoping as more and more people read, the reviews will appear. I do think we should keep an eye on market trends and tailor our books to that. While not giving up on horror, I've simply repackaged it to appeal to a wide audience who wouldn't normally read it.

'*Dead Again* is currently available as an ebook on Amazon.'



The women behind the warlords

'The journey towards writing a book of my own began when a publisher of my husband Ian's liked the premise behind a prospective book of his, but wasn't too keen on his intended style,' writes subscriber Trina Beckett.

'Without losing any of the integrity of what Ian had written, I simply altered the style. The publishers preferred it! He wrote in the dedication page "For Trina, who alone knows how much this book is her creation."

'THAT' was the moment. I could write a book.

'I decided to focus my attention on the wives of certain generals (including the "famous" Sarah Churchill in the recent film *The Favourite*) over a 200-year period. One thing was certain throughout – the public face of the power base was dominated by the male of the species. I submitted a synopsis to publishers Pen & Sword. Within days they came back with a YES and a six-page contract! At the tender age of 62, I was a bit of a late starter, and as I am now 67, you can tell it didn't happen overnight!

'Before I began to write *Deadlier Than the Male*, I knew very little, and in some cases nothing, about any of these women. The mantra for aspiring writers is usually write about what you know, but I've always been a risk-taker! My aim was not to use the internet, but to source only letters, journals, papers and biographies. Dusty old tomes sparkled with life, adventure and intrigue worthy of a blockbuster. It has felt like a bit of an intrusion at times, peering over the shoulders of individuals as they bared their hearts and minds.

'I have endeavoured to uncover a hidden dimension in the rise to prominence of some of Britain's most famous soldiers including Marlborough, Wellington, Roberts, Haig, and Montgomery, as a direct result of the influence of their wives, and unveil a series of fascinating relationships between powerful men and equally powerful women.

'It was never my intention to write an academic book, but to write history that a larger audience would be keen to read. Neither have I written from a feminist angle, but simply as an illustration of the variety of responses women received in different eras in their elevated positions as the wives of high-ranking military men, and how they rose above it. For good or ill, many wives were significant to their husbands' careers, but a Dr Thomas Miller Maguire pointedly remarked that female influence should be kept at a distance: "It is an abomination that the wives of generals, should make or mar an officer's career. The nation should put an end to this monstrosity at once." It didn't!



Flight of terror

'Have you heard of the Coats Mission?' asks subscriber David Hough.

'It was a real organisation set up during the Second World War. Its purpose was top secret, so secret that most of the relevant documents were destroyed at the end of the war. Discovering the story behind the mission led me to research further – and this is how my third aviation thriller, *Dead Reckoning*, was born.

'The story takes the reader on a hair-raising journey into alternative history. As a retired air traffic controller, I've used my aviation knowledge to plot the story along real wartime flightpaths and dangerous airfields.'

'*Dead Reckoning* is published by Cloudberry. You can find out more at www.cloudberrybooks.co.uk/dead-reckoning.'



Peter's next adventure

'I have now written and published six books,' writes subscriber Peter Kavanagh.

'My book series is called Art Myatt a children's adventure series – titles include: *The Jewel of the Sun*, *The Little Green Dragon*, *The Viking Treasure* and *The Magical Island*. This year I have written and published my first murder mystery novel, *Murder is Planned*. I have also written and published another book called *Don't let the Ghosts Out*.

All of my books are available from Amazon in paperback and to download.

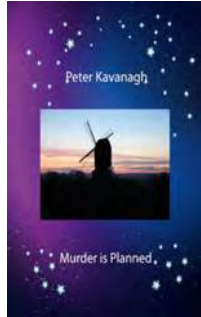
'I live in Oxfordshire where my stories are inspired by the beautiful countryside and wonderful architecture. I am very grateful to my lovely wife Maggie and eldest daughter Emma for carrying out all the proof reading and editing of my books for me.

'So why Art Myatt? I have always enjoyed reading brilliant books and wanted to create my own children's adventure series. My stories are for young and old and the characters I have created, Art, Amy and a dog called Mr Beagle, all go on exciting adventures.

'I decided it was time I wrote a murder mystery novel, so I wrote *Murder is Planned* about a private detective, called O'Mally. A popular detective with the ability to see and communicate with the deceased, O'Mally is challenged to solve a murder mystery that has yet to happen!

'In *Don't Let The Ghosts Out*, teenagers Tommy and Lucy discover a closed boarding school is haunted and the rooms are filled with ghosts.'

Website: www.peter-kavanagh.co.uk



Top times for Lady Lord Mayors

'I would love to let *Writing Magazine* know about my recent success at the East Anglian Book Awards,' writes subscriber Phyllida Scrivens.

'As a past contributor to Subscriber Spotlight, your readers may be interested to learn that my second book *The Lady Lord Mayors of Norwich* (Pen & Sword 2018) was awarded the best Biography and Memoir prize at a lunchtime ceremony at Carrow Road Stadium on 23 November last year. Thirty of my family and friends joined me to support the book, including no less than seven of my "chapters", each one a former Lord Mayor of Norwich. We were all thrilled when my name was read out!'

Website: <https://myladylordmayor.wordpress.com/>



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New growth

Get in the spirit of renewal and give your writing a spring makeover with these creative writing exercises from **Jenny Alexander**

It's springtime, and nature is full of the promise and vulnerability of new life – fresh leaves on the trees, fresh shoots in the earth, baby animals and birds in gardens, parks and fields.

The spirit of spring inspires us with optimism and joy, and calls up a strong desire for the new in our lives. For writers, personal writing across different genres is a great way of discovering new topics and themes, and trying out new writing voices.

So give it a go with these springtime free-range writing forays. There's only one rule: stick to the timings. That way, you haven't got time to sit staring at the blank page, and your inner critic can't get a look-in.

Memoir

Spring is all about new beginnings. Write a list of new beginnings you have experienced in your life, such as starting a new job, relationship or writing project, or moving to a new home. Take three minutes, just whatever comes, from any stage in your life.

Choose one.

Think about the build-up to this new beginning and then focus on one particular scene – something that happened. A story needs action, not just background, thoughts and feelings.

For example, in my journey to becoming a published author, I remember the moment my new agent phoned to tell me that we'd had an offer for my first book. I was in the garden cutting down some overhanging branches when the call came through.

Use all your senses to fully recall the scene. I remember the feel of the saw in my hand, the warmth of the air, the sounds of my children playing in their paddling pool...

Write the scene. Take fifteen minutes.

Fiction

Choose one of the things from the list of new beginnings you made for your memoir piece. Think about the build-up to this new beginning and then focus on one particular scene.

Describe the scene in a sentence, starting 'Someone...' In my story it might be, 'Someone gets a life-changing phone call' or 'Someone hears good news...'

Take the bare bones action of your scene, as described in that sentence, to create a fictional story. Who is the 'someone'? Make some notes on their name, age and appearance. What do they love? What do they hate? What are they afraid of? Take five minutes to get a feel for their personality.

What is the situation? In my story, the good news could be an all-clear from the doctor or a wedding invitation.

Write the story. Take twenty minutes.

Tip!

This is a common and useful trick of fiction writers, to take the bones of a personal experience as a starting point or way in to a story.

Non-fiction

Spring cleaning, DIY and gardening – this time of year is all about renewal on the home front too.

Write a magazine article about springtime jobs in the garden, or ideas for giving your living space a new look. If fashion is more your thing, you could write about creating a spring wardrobe, or developing a new diet and fitness regime.

If the practical side of things doesn't appeal, extend the choice of topic to any kind of fresh start, such as clearing your mental closets – which attitudes

would you recommend getting rid of to make way for new ones?

Write for twenty minutes.

Tip!

The easiest way to get your writing mind into gear for doing articles is by flicking through a magazine or blog that covers the subject area you're thinking about. This gives you a feel for the scope and tone of your article. Will you go for authoritative or personal? Serious or funny?


Poetry

What do you associate with spring? As well as renewal in nature, springtime ushers in a new season of clothing and footwear, Easter eggs in the shops, hot cross buns...

Write a list of all the things you think of when you think of springtime in your local area. Choose some of them to make a list poem.

Start, 'It is...' and repeat the prompt as often as you like. 'It is daffodils dotted along Angel Lane / Pale primroses under the trees.

It is...' If you live in a city centre, it might be more to do with Easter eggs in your local supermarket, new season's sandals in shoe shop windows or perhaps baby birds and spring flowers in your garden.

You can use a regular pattern of rhyme and rhythm, or choose to keep it free. Play about with different versions for about twenty minutes. Let thoughts of springtime lift you up on the light, bright wings of a poem. 

Tip!

If it's a nice day and you can't think of anything to write, go out for a walk. Take a note of all the spring things you see, hear, touch and smell in the world around you

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"I'm currently working on my **fourth book**, have been paid for my writing by at least 15 different magazines, and now **earn half my income from writing** – all thanks to The Writers Bureau's course."

Sarah Plater



The Writers Bureau taught me to write confidently and responsibly. I learned to produce original and interesting stories, I just have to be true to myself. **Writing became a fulfilling hobby that pays!**"

Criselle Nunag



"Due to the advance I received for *Girl On The Line* I **have now been able to become a full time writer**. I also managed to find an agent to represent me for my work in progress – a crime novel. My Writers Bureau course is where it all started."

Alice Vinten



"I have been published in different papers and magazines and am now producing around **250 articles a year**. It's going a bit too well at times! Seriously, it's very satisfying, stimulating and great fun – and

thanks again to the WB for launching me on a **second career**. I meet so many interesting people and count myself mighty lucky."

Martin Read



"If you listen to the tutors and take time to read the material you can be a working writer; it really is an excellent course. I've found part-time work as a freelance writer for Academic Knowledge. I've earned just under **£2000** in the past year."

Steph Thompson



"I am delighted to tell everyone that the **course is everything it says on the tin, excellent!** I have wanted to write for years, and this course took me by the hand and helped me turn my scribbles into something much more professional. I am delighted

that **my writing is being published and I am actually being paid**. All thanks to the Comprehensive Creative Writing course."

George Stewart

Why not embark on an exciting writing journey of your own? Enrol on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course for only £444 (or Easy Pay Terms from £41 pm) and you could be soon writing your own success story.

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First Days

by Damien McKeating



I do not want to go back to school. My first day was confusing. I did not know what anyone was talking about. When I hung my coat on my peg (it had a picture of me on it) a boy called Neil said ‘Nice coat,’ and everyone laughed. I didn’t understand but I laughed as well because everyone was. Then someone pushed me. I didn’t see who it was and when I turned around everyone was going to find their seats.

There were lots of things in the room. There was a board with all of the letters on, another board with numbers on, one with the date and the weather, another with adjectives, another with punctuation and some more with pictures of the class and a feelings chart and cursive writing. I liked looking at the alphabet board. I looked at the letters and said each one as I read them.

My teacher was Mrs Finch. A finch is a kind of bird but it is also her name. As I was reading the board she was talking and she started to get louder and louder. I realised she was shouting my name and looking at me. Her face was red and her eyebrows were scrunched together.

‘When I am talking,’ she said, ‘you should be listening.’

I didn’t know what to say so I didn’t



Damien McKeating was born and a short time after that he developed a love of fantasy and the supernatural. His published short stories range from modern takes on Irish mythology to SF adventures for young readers. At times he has been known to masquerade as a musician and create peculiar folk songs. He writes daily and is currently the oldest he has ever been.

say anything. Mrs Finch said a lot of things and when I thought I knew what she was saying she was already saying something else. When she gave us some paper, I saw everyone drawing pictures but I didn’t know what to draw so I copied what the girl next to me did.

‘Why have you copied Jessica?’ Mrs Finch asked.

I didn’t know so I didn’t say anything.

‘This is supposed to be your work,’ she said.

‘I drew it,’ I told her.

Everyone laughed, even though I wasn’t lying. Mrs Finch made a face where her lips and eyes became very thin.

Lots of things kept happening. When we went outside to play, I watched the other children running around. They were hitting each other and shouting ‘Tig,’ and it looked like

fun. I ran with them and hit one of the children. He started to cry and the other children shouted for the teacher.

‘Play nicely,’ she said.

Everyone ran away. They were laughing. I followed them and laughed too. I tried to hit another child but they shouted at me. ‘You’re not it!’

When we went back to the classroom Mrs Finch said lots of things again. I looked at the alphabet board. I know all of my letters and can write my name. I liked the pictures on the board. There was a picture for every letter. An apple for A, and a ball for B. My favourite was the whale for W.

I realised Mrs Finch was saying my name again.

‘Am I interrupting you?’ she said.

‘No,’ I replied. She wasn’t.

She made that thin face again. ‘Maybe you would like to come and

teach the class.' She held out her arm, gesturing at the space in front of the white board.

I stood up. Everyone laughed. 'Sit down,' Mrs Finch said, her face very red.

I sat down. My mum had said I had to come to school to learn things but I didn't know what I was supposed to learn.

In the afternoon I needed to go to the toilet. I put my hand up but Mrs Finch was talking and she only said, 'You'll have to wait, put your hand down.'

I waited. I didn't want to put my hand up again. I didn't want Mrs Finch to get her red face. I didn't want the other children to laugh again. I knew they were laughing at me but I didn't understand what was funny. It made my insides twist.

Eventually I needed the toilet so much that it started to hurt and I had an accident in my chair. I didn't want to tell Mrs Finch. I didn't want anyone to see. The girl sitting next to me pointed and began to shout. Everyone stood up to look. They started to laugh.

Mrs Finch made a face I didn't understand.

She took me to the toilets and sent someone else to look after the class. She helped to find me some spare clothes.

'I don't know why you didn't say something,' she said. 'You should have said something. This is not good enough.'

Her voice sounded funny in the toilets. She wasn't shouting but it still sounded too loud. I looked down at the floor and tried not to cry. I was afraid that if I cried she would get her red face and get loud.

'What are we going to do with you?' she said.

My mum said that to me once when I got chocolate pudding over my clothes. I remember that when my mum said it, she was smiling and she tickled me when she wiped my face. Mrs Finch was not smiling. Mrs Finch

did not look like she would tickle me.

When it was time to go home my mum had a long talk with Mrs Finch. I waited with them. I watched the other children leave and saw some of them point and laugh at me. I started to cry then. My mum saw me crying and started to get angry. She shouted at Mrs Finch, took hold of my hand, and walked me very quickly towards the car. It was hard to keep up and I kept tripping over my feet.

At the car my mum hugged me. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'It's not you. It's just... that woman!'

I held onto my mum. I could smell her clothes, which smell like our washing machine. I could see some hair on her coat. It was white hair, like our cat.

We went home.

I didn't go back to school.

My mum spent a long time on the phone. She got angry with lots of people. She talked loudly. She sighed a lot.

'I've been telling everyone but no one would listen,' she said. She said that a lot, or words like that. She knew things that other people didn't. I wondered if she'd learnt them in school.

I don't want to go back to school.

It's a new school, my mum says. It's a different school. But I still don't want to go. I just want to stay at home, but I heard someone say that you go to jail if you don't go to school.

Mum drove me to the new school and I didn't feel good. I didn't know where we were going. We drove down roads I didn't recognise.

'It's just a visit,' Mum said. 'To see how you get on, okay?'

My stomach wouldn't stop moving. It was hard to talk and my voice felt stuck in my throat.

The school was small and big. It was just one building and the other school was lots of buildings, so it was small. But the one building was kind of big.

A teacher met me and my mum. He was called Mr Jones. He smiled a lot.

He said hello to me and knelt down to talk to me. I said hello.

'I hope you like our school,' he said. 'Would you like to meet Miss Cooper? She's the teacher in Penguins' class.'

I like penguins. I got lost on the way to the classroom. I didn't know where we were but I followed mum and Mr Jones. There were lots of doors and we went by some stairs. Down a long corridor we came to another door with a picture of a Penguin on it.

'Here we are,' Mr Jones said and smiled again.

The classroom was small. There were eight children in there. There were three teachers.

'Hello,' a lady said. 'I'm Miss Cooper.'

She told me who the other adults were, and the children, and showed me where I could sit.

My mum went to talk to Mr Jones and I stayed with the Penguins. Miss Cooper told me what we were doing now and what was going to happen to next. She pointed to a board that had pictures on to remind me.

I looked around the classroom. There were pictures on the cupboards and the drawers, so I knew what was in all of them. There were no pictures on the walls and they were painted an eggshell blue, which I remembered off a card we saw when buying paint for our living room.

Without the walls making noise it was easy to listen to Miss Cooper. She didn't talk much. She did show us lots of things and I got to play with dough and squish it into different shapes. Miss Cooper asked me what the shapes were and I told her.

When mum came back to get me, I realised my stomach had stopped moving.

'Can I come back again?' I asked.

Mr Jones and my mum laughed and I didn't know why.

'Yes,' mum said.

I'm looking forward to going back to school. 

EXPERT analysis

Read the judge's analysis at:
<http://writ.rs/wmapr19>

Runner-up in the School Competition was **Barbara Young**, Otterburn, Northumberland, whose story is published on www.writers-online.co.uk. Also shortlisted were: **Dominic Bell**, Hull; **Sam Burt**, London E7; **Jodie Rose Carpenter**, Birmingham; **Pauline Dewberry**, Erith, Kent; **Andrew French**, Redcar, Teesside; **Lesley Middleton**, Retford, Nottinghamshire; **Karen Rodgers**, Chard, Somerset; **Kathy Schilbach**, Lancing, West Sussex; **Jessica Woodward**, Oxford



in the looplink

Alison Chisholm explores a work by a poet playing with a brand new form

One of the greatest excitements of writing poetry is the production of a brand new form. You are in control. You choose the name of the form. You make the rules. You may be making them for just one idea you want to explore; but the excitement redoubles when you realise the device has more to give, and that other people have picked up your form and run with it.

Poet Francesca Hunt of Llanfair Caereinion, Powys devised a new pattern for poetry, the looplink, that is simple to work (encouraging poets to try it), but has plenty of scope. Simplicity is never a dumbing down of content, of course; often the simplest wording communicates the most powerful thoughts.

Incidentally, the name looplink is still under discussion; but it seems an ideal, descriptive term for the style. Let's have a look at a poem written in the new form, consider the form's rules, and think about possible tweaks to develop them.

STILLED

*strong waves crash the pebbled shore
shoreline distant to the eye
eye dazzled by reflected light
light from late autumnal sun
sun warms the cooling wind
windswept ridges in the sand
sand castles built by youthful fingers
fingers of cloud streak through the sky
sky darkens with the close of day
day of memories as I walk alone
alone in melancholic mood
mood yields peace ... my heart is strong*

The set requirements are that the last word of each line of the poem becomes the first of the next. The last word of the final line is the same as the opening word of the

poem. Also, there are no punctuation marks or capital letters in the piece, although its inventor does introduce the ellipsis in the last line.

Two suggestions – rather than ‘rules’ – are that the wording should be largely iambic, so that the insistent rhythm of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one runs through the poem; and that the presentation may follow a slanting line, as shown here.

An attractive facet of the form is that there is some flexibility with the repetitions. Although most of the line end words recur in the same format at the start of the next line, *shore* has been changed to *shoreline* and *wind* becomes *windswept*. These tiny variants, which extend the words within the same meaning, add pleasing variety. It would also be possible to use homophones, so that *eye* could be followed by *I*, or *sun* by *son*; or to introduce unconnected longer words, changing *light* to *lightning* or *sand* to *sandalwood*. These possibilities could be decided by the deviser of the form and included in the instructions, or left to the discretion of the poet.

One question that gives poets writing in form pause for thought is whether the pattern selected is the perfect one to convey the content of the poem. This seems to be a versatile form, working alongside the subject matter in this example, but which could be equally effective for all sorts of subjects.

Francesca Hunt has not set a specific number of lines for her form. This, of course, gives the writer scope to vary the length depending on the content, but there is a point to note here. Any form involving repetition runs the risk of becoming tedious. To consider this in the context of established patterns, look at the villanelle. That form requires the constant repetition of two lines in their entirety. It may consist of any odd number of three-line stanzas, with an additional stanza of four lines to close the poem; but tradition has gravitated to a total of nineteen lines, giving five tercets and the final quatrain. If the poem is shorter than this, there is little space to

If you would like your poem to be considered for Poetry Workshop, send it by email to: jtelfer@writersnews.co.uk

Poetry in practice

demonstrate the pattern. If it is longer, the repetition loses impact and fails to hold the reader's interest.

The loopleft is repeating a single word once only, but because each repeat delivers the word twice consecutively, the effect will chime on the reader's ear. Reading aloud the poem shown here suggests that this repetition device works well for the twelve lines, but might not be able to sustain levels of interest if the poem were much longer. Sometimes the message needs more lines.

There could be an opportunity to extend the poem, then, by dividing it into separate stanzas, with their lines of white space to break up the text. The full circle of making the first and last words of the poem the same could still be applied to the entire poem, or could occur within each stanza. The optional slanted layout could continue across the page, or each stanza could begin with a left justified line. In this poem, the visual impact of slanting each stanza would give the appearance of waves on the shore – a happy coincidence for the content.


There is room for a rhymed version of the form. The rhymes could fall in specific places, or be used randomly at line ends throughout the poem. They could even be scattered internally through the writing, giving a more subtle effect.

One issue concerning unpunctuated poetry that can be a problem is that the lines become disjointed, so that the whole piece reads like a list of images rather than a complete poem. Even the repetition element makes it difficult for the poem to cohere for the reader. Although the example we have moves easily and logically from one point to the next, there is still a slight jerkiness, which would be exacerbated in the hands of a less experienced poet. It could easily be smoothed with the application of sentence structuring, but this would go against one of the particular rules of the form.

Any new form needs time and space to 'settle' before it is ready to enter the range of set forms. It might be useful to experiment with different approaches to see how the effect of the pattern alters with tweaks to the structuring, especially in the realms of length of the piece, punctuation and grammar.

Once the form is finalised, the next excitement is to share information about it, with the aim of eventually making it part of the toolkit for all other poets. Its inventor takes the lead by submitting examples to a range of small press publications and poetry websites in the hope that it will be read by widening circles of poets and general readers.

When a good few examples have appeared in the public eye, it's time to share information about the structuring via the internet, using social media, blogging, and maybe establishing a website where people can upload their own poems in the form. Writing about its structuring and, possibly with the backing of a writers' group, organising a competition for loopleft poems, will consolidate the existence of the new pattern and continue spreading the word.

If you like the idea of the loopleft, why not have a go? You could be one of its first writers; and if your piece is published, you will be able to fascinate readers by being a part of the emergence of a brand new form. 

Day seem drained of poetic inspiration? Not if you take Doris Corti's advice

It's a grey day, no sun, just a mass of clouds. Nothing inspiring to write about – but hey, wait a minute, aren't writers supposed to write regardless?

That's what friends think, that I sit down and write. As simple as that, well is it?

If you wake up to an uninspiring day filled with grey, take the opposite viewpoint. I think of a different colour – one that leads me into other thoughts. At this point I am not consciously writing a poem, simply putting first thoughts into lines.

*I like icecream
and the colour blue,
blue of the sky, the sea,
a new jumper.*

Not quite a poem, but it's a start. That first line could be extended to:

*I like icecream, the chocolate variety.
You know that, and always buy what I like,
you take me to a known place
where we stand on a cliff top overlooking the sea,
the blue of it is like my jumper
one that you admire.*

It is obvious that the poem is about two people, one talking about the other. It might be a poem about lovers and a shared memory. It could be about so much more: a parting, a loss, even grief.

All this began from a grey day which I disliked and turned my thoughts to an opposite colour. I might now decide what theme I will follow. Will it be a happy one or perhaps tinged with sadness?

This is the time to persevere, for now the hard work begins. If you have written a few lines as I have suggested, now ask yourself two important questions. Do these lines make sense? Is there a theme developing? If your answer is 'yes' to both these questions then you might consider making them into a poem. A short structure could be a framework.

The following example is a triolet by Robert Bridges which is just eight lines long; three of them are repeats. The form is usually written in iambic pentameter but other patterns can be used so long as all the lines have the same metre and length.

*Triolet
When first we met, we did not guess
That love would prove so hard a master;
Of more than common friendliness
When first we met we did not guess
Who could foretell the sore distress,
The inevitable disaster,
When first we met? We did not guess
That love would prove so hard a master.*

Exercises

Write about the first person you saw this morning
a) in free verse b) as a triolet

Perfect your poetry with a WM Creative Writing course. See <http://writ.rs/cwcourses>

Poetry from A to Z

Poet **Alison Chisholm** guides you through the language of poetry

The **VIRELAI NOUVEAU** relies on just two rhymes – and its form is fluid, in that it is seldom used and so poets tend to adopt their own rules to suit the poem they are writing. In general, all lines have the same metre, and the opening two lines form a rhyming couplet, appearing alternately at the end of each stanza. The poem closes with them placed in reverse order. Sometimes the opening lines are presented as a separate stanza. The number of stanzas (after three) varies, as does the number of lines in a stanza.

For example purposes, this virelai nouveau, written in iambic tetrameter, has the minimum of three stanzas, and

AN ORDINARY DAY

*It seemed an ordinary day
until my hopes were swept away.
You stood there, brazen, held her tight
mere hours since you had said you'd stay
with me forever. In plain sight
you broke your vow with that display.
It seemed an ordinary day*

*but now, my thoughts in disarray,
I'd go to some safe place to weigh
your words, your actions – but my flight
would show she'd won. Or I could play
the same sad game. No need to fight –
I'd shame you both, keep tears at bay –
until my hopes were swept away.*

*I saw you holding her. Dismay
has turned to rage, resentment, spite.
Until my hopes were swept away
it seemed an ordinary day.*



takes the pattern: A1 A2 b a b a A1
a a b a b a A2 a b A2 A1.

EXERCISE: Write a virelai nouveau to include a point of conflict. Choose your rhyming sounds with care in view of the number you'll need, and remember that the first two lines will appear in reverse order at the end of the poem ... and need to make sense.

VISIONARY POETRY deals with the unseen and unexplained, which may be fantasy, religious, arcane or purely imaginative. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* is a good example.

EXERCISE: Write a poem in any form that is rooted in something that cannot be explained. You may simply open up the subject, or create your own explanation for it.

The poet's **VOICE** is the factor that allows people to recognise the writer even when a poem appears anonymously. It has to do with the way language is used, influenced by selection of vocabulary, manner of applying figures of speech, subject matter, individual style... all those elements that give a poem its character. Your natural voice develops with experience of both reading and writing poetry. It cannot be forced or assumed. And while we all like to think every poem we write is unique and glitters in its own identity, we can be flattered if someone says 'saw the poem – no name on it – knew it was yours.' That's down to voice.

A **VOLTA** in a poem is the position of a slight turn in meaning or shift in emphasis. In sonnets, for example, this change of angle occurs after the eighth line (Italian sonnets) allowing

for a balance of material in the two (almost) halves, or the twelfth line (English sonnets) to give a final couplet punchline.

VOWEL RHYME, also known as assonance, works when the same vowel sounds appear in stressed syllables, regardless of the accompanying consonant sounds. So *feet, me, seal, fiendish* and *meeting* all demonstrate vowel rhyme.

WAR POETRY usually refers to the First World War, and is identified with such poets as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas and Rupert Brooke. While there are vivid narrative poems of the era, some take a more lyrical approach, or focus on specific elements of a situation from an unexpected angle.

The **WHEEL** is the main part of a device used at the end of a stanza in Middle English poetry, but although it's a form from the past, it can be most effective as an occasional device in more contemporary writing, and may stand alone as a refrain.

It's preceded by a short line with just one or two stressed syllables, the bob. This is often tied to the final line of the section or stanza by enjambment, and rhymes with the second and fourth lines of the wheel, to produce a pattern of a b a b a. The wheel has three stressed syllables per line, as shown here:

*... and in their pain
regret
persuaded them to see
that anyone they met
might only prove to be
a further risk, a threat.*

**ENTER
NOW**
Submit poems up to 40 lines.
Prizes are £100 and £50.
See p95 for entry details

Touched by genius

Be inspired by the life and works of Leonardo da Vinci in WM's latest poetry competition, advises **Alison Chisholm**



Leonardo da Vinci died in May 1519, and when he passed the world lost a man many believe to be its greatest genius. He was an artist, sculptor, philosopher, anatomist, architect, musician, mathematician, engineer, mapmaker... the list goes on. He was also fiendishly handsome, and in 2017 his painting *Salvator Mundi* became the biggest seller at auction of all time, stripping the title from Picasso with a difference of more than \$260 million. He defines the term 'Renaissance Man', inspired Dan Brown, probably invented the tank, the helicopter and the adding machine, managed to keep his private life private, and looked after his mother. (He paid her funeral expenses in 1495.)

To commemorate his anniversary, *Writing Magazine* is setting a poetry competition. Poems are sought on any aspect of his life and work, and with themes covering creativity, artistic and scientific pursuits, invention and practicality, there should be plenty of material to prompt exciting entries. From the enigmatic smile of the *Mona Lisa* to the nightmarish mirror room that shows an infinite number of images of a person, from speculating about the life of an illegitimate child in 1450s Italy to those 13,000 pages of notes and drawings, there's something to inspire every poet to create a masterpiece for the master.

Every poem shortlisted in the competition is likely to have been inspired by a careful study of the man and his work. This is an occasion when research will yield gems. Take time to consider your theme and the angle from

which you'll approach it. Ask yourself which are the obvious triggers for poems about the man and his work, and then avoid them ... or deliver them with such compelling skill that they could never be seen as clichés, but find their own originality.

Entries may be submitted in any form of poetry, so check that you have selected the best vehicle for your chosen subject matter. If you are using free verse, make sure that there are plenty of examples of slant rhyme to hold it together, and that carefully thought-out line and stanza breaks work with the phrasing to create a fluent poem. If it's blank verse, see that the iambic pentameters are in place. If you prefer a rhymed pattern, confirm that all your rhymes are natural and precise, and that any metrical requirement has been observed.

Don't be afraid of taking your partially-completed work back to the drawing board and starting again. It may seem a frustrating task, but sometimes you need to try three or four – or even more – approaches before you know you've struck the right note. It's better to try out your idea in a number of different patterns to see which is most appropriate, rather than labour for hours on your first form, then wish you'd changed it.

Be aware of the worth of a fascinating title, the extra edge intelligent sentence structuring will give to your piece, and the value of using powerful vocabulary and interesting figures of speech to create impact.

Because there are so few words in a poem, every one must pull its weight and add to the effectiveness of the whole piece. Be prepared to look at each individual word,

asking yourself whether it's necessary, whether it is the best word to use in that place, and whether it will add to or detract from both the sense and music of the poem.

Check that you have made good use of imagery, so that the reader can recognise sensory descriptions that bring the poem to life. Whenever you can incorporate specific examples of things seen, heard, smelt, tasted and touched, alongside any emotional reactions to them, you are painting a clearer picture for the reader.

Remember the value of sharp focus. Writing in precise terms with attention to fine detail puts across far more information than writing in more general, abstract terms about a broad subject. The bigger picture is implied when you concentrate on small details and communicate your information with precision.

Don't lose sight of all the other people who are competing alongside you. Every one of them will be working hard to produce the best poem they can possibly manage. All you have to do is make sure yours is better. For added inspiration, look at a back copy of the magazine with the results of a competition in it. Hold yours next to the winner. Is the same quality there?

Every time you manage to go back to your complete MS and consider both its overall effectiveness and the selection of words and images, you will give yourself the opportunity to enhance your writing, and elevate it from something competent to something brilliant. It's the brilliant entries that stand the best chance of winning prizes. Good luck. **WM**



Branch out and feel the fear

Ghost story author **Rachel Burge** offers advice on how to write a scary story

Whether you're writing an atmospheric ghost story or a blood-chilling horror, there are lots of techniques you can use to terrify your readers and leave them afraid to turn off the light.

Characters to care about

The first thing most people think about when writing a scary story is the monster. But in order for readers to be truly afraid, they need to care about your characters. If they're not emotionally invested in your protagonist, they won't care if they

escape the serial killer or make it out of the haunted house alive.

When we read any story, we project ourselves into the characters. In the case of horror, if we're afraid for the main character, we're also afraid for ourselves – and that's when our heart will start thumping.

While the 'big bad' of your story has to be frightening, make sure you give equal attention to your protagonist. You need to know what drives them (their wants, needs, flaws and fears), before you put them in danger. They don't have to be likeable, but they do need to be relatable. Create characters who feel emotionally believable and readers will be more likely to accept the more supernatural elements of your story.

Remember that the scale of threat is not related to the level of fear. There might be a global alien invasion in progress, but if you want readers to feel the horror of the situation give them a single family to care about and show their desperate struggle for survival.

Don't reveal the monster too soon

The greatest source of fear is the unknown. If you let readers know exactly what your main character is facing from the start, you will miss out on the opportunity to build tension and create a sense of dread.

For this reason it's better to reveal your monster (ghost, demon, alien, psychopath), as late in the story as possible. That doesn't mean you can't offer tantalising glimpses – blackened fingers under the door, a face in the shadows – just keep the big reveal until near the end.

The things we can't see are the most frightening, so tap into your readers' primal fears and let them fill in the blanks. The more we have to use our imagination, the more likely it is that the story will linger in our minds after we turn the final page.

There are lots of ways to show what your monster is capable of – and in turn, demonstrate the threat it poses. Your characters might come across a mutilated victim, discover some information (in an arcane book of spells or the internet), or be warned by someone to turn back now, before it's too late.

Keep the reader asking questions

Uncertainty, whether that's something glimpsed from the corner of your eye, or not being sure of another character's motivations, is a sure way to make your reader feel unsettled.

You will inevitably have to provide answers as the story progresses, but each time you solve a mystery, make sure you raise further questions. At no point should your readers feel that they have all the answers – and that includes the ending. The most powerful endings in horror leave some element unexplained.

Avoid clichés and tropes

From the girl who goes down the cellar, to the man who insists on taking a short cut through the woods, horror is full of characters who make bad decisions. If you want your story to feel realistic, ask yourself what most sensible people would do in that situation.

If your character does something that puts them in danger, make sure you give them a valid reason. Perhaps they are devoted to their cat. When the cat goes missing, they are distraught – so when they hear a crash in the cellar, it's believable that they would go and look for kitty.

Every genre has its conventions, but horror has more than its fair share of tropes and clichés. If your reader can sense where a scene is heading (because they've read it all before) and are then proved right, they will feel either bored or comfortable. Neither is good. You can either avoid clichés, or use them to your advantage. In other words, make readers think they know what will happen – but then do the unexpected.

Unsettled and unsafe

Your main character will not be in constant danger throughout the story, but that doesn't mean they should feel safe. Maybe they are living in a dodgy neighbourhood, worried about their elderly mother, or their boss is harassing them. Perhaps the story starts on the same day their cat goes missing...

The challenge is to maintain a sense of unease in the reader, so that they're already feeling tense when you bring out the jump scares.

Atmosphere and setting

The setting you choose will have a big influence on mood and atmosphere. Start by thinking about scenery, as well as the weather and climate of a place.

I set my ghost story in the Lofoten Islands in winter, when there's only a few hours of light each day. The near-permanent darkness and remote location – an isolated cabin in the snow – helps to create a sense of claustrophobia.

Rather than writing about a haunted mansion or abandoned hospital, can you take your readers somewhere interesting that they haven't seen before? Lots of urban places have the potential to be creepy at night or when there's no one there: a supermarket, empty office block, a building site.

Once you've chosen a setting, consider how it resonates with the character arcs and the story you're writing. Setting is more than just backdrop. It can also convey meaning and carry theme, so it's worth spending some time to get it right.

Use all five senses

Once you've chosen a setting, close your eyes and imagine yourself there. What can you see, hear, smell, taste and feel? You may not use all five senses in every scene, but if you can vary the sensory descriptions, it will help your reader visualise themselves in the story.

Atmosphere is most effective when it's built in layers. So you might describe the setting in broad strokes at the start of a new scene, and then drop in a creepy detail or two in the following paragraphs. Pepper your descriptions with vivid images, rather than writing one big block of description, and it will help draw your reader into the world of the story.

Immerse yourself

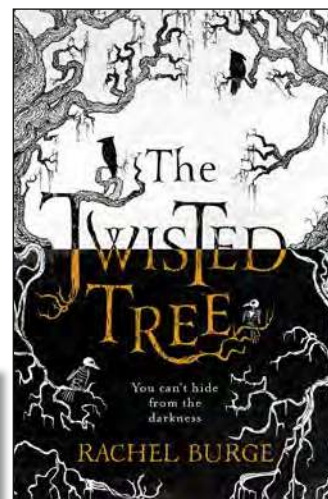
If you can, try to visit where your story is set – it's one of the best ways to immerse yourself in the atmosphere of a place. Alternatively, read books and watch movies that share a similar setting to the one you're writing about.

It can also help to create atmosphere while you are writing. When I'm working on a spooky scene, I will write surrounded by flickering candles and with a horror soundtrack playing.

I also have a pin board in my office with inspirational images, as well as Pinterest boards [see my board for *The Twisted Tree* here: <https://writ.rs/twistedtree>], where I collect images that I find particularly evocative.

The more vivid a setting feels for you, the easier it will be to convey to the reader. **Wm**

The Twisted Tree by Rachel Burge, out now published by Hot Key Books



Starting out writing exercise

If you're just starting out and don't have a story in mind, it can help to choose an image or situation that you find scary and brainstorm ideas from there. Rather than thinking about what other people find frightening, focus on what scares you. Draw upon your own fears and it will help you come up with an original story idea and give your writing emotional honesty.

- What are the earliest fears you can remember, and which ones have stayed with you from childhood?
- What do you fear most now?
- What worries keep you awake at night?
- What's the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?
- What's the worst nightmare you've ever had?

Next, make a list of things (characters, scenarios, images, settings) from books and movies that you find particularly scary. What is it about each one that is frightening? Jot down any thoughts or story ideas that come to you. As the story idea progresses, imagine yourself as the main character and keep asking yourself what you wouldn't want to happen next.



The food of love

Helen M Walters looks at using food to give your writing layers of sensory texture

Food is an important factor in all our lives, not just because we need it to function but because it is tied up with so many emotive subjects. Eating together is a social thing to do, it's at the heart of family life and it can also be seen as a romantic thing to do with the right person. Any mention of food in fiction carries with it connotations of love, nurturing, sharing and pleasure.

Because of all this it can be a very powerful factor in short story telling. It is significant that this month's story *A Bunch Of Broccoli On The Third Shelf* by Lara Vapnyar comes from a collection called *Broccoli And Other Tales Of Food And Love*. All the stories in the collection look at aspects of food and human emotion. As always, you will gain most from this master class if you read the story for yourself : <https://writ.rs/broccoli>.

Notice how in the very first sentence of the story Nina's husband equates food with desire, describing how the broccoli is 'seduced and abandoned'. It is more than just a vegetable. It is symbolic of the way Nina lives her life, constantly buying



fresh vegetables but never actually doing anything with them.

For Nina, a new immigrant to the US from Russia, shopping for vegetables in the local grocery store has become an important part of her weekly routine. She enjoys the way it makes her feel.

Lara Vapnyar has brought a huge array of descriptive prose to bear when talking about how Nina interacts with the vegetables and the shopping process. Notice how she has distilled so much meaning into the one word 'Sunripe' as used to describe a box of tomatoes.

She also has some sparse, but very telling, descriptions of other fruit and vegetables. The reader can imagine the gooseberries in their little plastic baskets and the potatoes so tiny that they are nutlike. But it is when she gets to the broccoli that we find the most vivid description of all, encapsulating its fresh smell and tree-like appearance.

Notice also how, through Nina, we get to find out not only how the fruit and vegetables look and smell, but how they feel. With her we run our fingers over tomatoes and cup

avocados, dig our fingernails into an orange, feel the featheriness of herbs and pat and tap melons for ripeness.

But Nina, we find, despite her pleasure in the selecting and buying of produce, never gets any further than that. The vegetables are indeed abandoned in the fridge while Nina goes out to parties with her husband. This is mirrored in the way in which Nina is, in turn, abandoned by her husband at a time described as coinciding with the arrival of fresh tomatoes and peaches in the shops.

Another interesting thing in this story is the way in which the description of the fresh fruit and vegetables contrasts with that of more processed food. When Nina describes the food served at the parties she goes to, it isn't with the same joy. She describes plates loaded with cold cuts, bread on cutting boards and pickles swimming in jars. She is not able to relate to this food in the same way. Later she describes how her sister clears out her fridge of rotten vegetables and replaces them with packaged goods in cartons and jars. But to Nina even the smell of vegetables gone

rotten is somewhat pleasurable.

Although Nina doesn't get around to preparing and cooking the many vegetables she buys, she does fantasise about doing so. She has a big pile of cookery books by her bed and she reads the recipes at night. Notice the language here such as the use of the words euphoric and passionate, and the way her mind and her lips linger on the instructions to peel, chop, slice and crush.

After her husband leaves, Nina stops buying vegetables and can only bring herself to flick through the indexes of the recipe books. Compare the passage where she does this with the earlier one where she luxuriates in the full recipes. The difference in feel is very striking.

Nina becomes characterised as 'a vegetable lover' despite her own admission that she has never cooked a vegetable. It is only when she meets another man who offers to cook with her that she even goes so far as to buy the kitchen utensils she needs in order to do so.

She buys an array of equipment in advance of her 'cooking date', but ironically is so caught up in that, that she forgets to actually buy any vegetables. This results in them just cooking the forgotten bunch of broccoli nestled in the fridge referred to in the title of the story.

The final paragraph, where she finally gets to inhale the smell of cooking broccoli, sees Nina fulfilling what she has longed for in what comes across as an almost religious experience. The ending, like the whole story, is satisfying and a great illustration of how food can be integral to the plot of a story.

A feast of words

Now we've seen how powerful food can be in a story, why don't you give it a go in your own work?

When I teach short story writing, I often do an exercise with students where I ask them to pick a piece of paper listing a type of food out of an envelope. Then I give them fifteen minutes to write about whatever that word evokes. Sometimes they will come up with something autobiographical, and sometimes they will come up with a piece of fiction.

Either way it can be used as the basis for a longer short story.

I think one of the reasons that this exercise is so successful is that food is so very evocative. Tastes and smells can take us back to a particular time in our lives. Or they can whisk us off to an exotic place that we may only be aware of in our imaginations.

If you feel like giving this exercise a go, here are a few foodstuffs that you might want to choose from: fish and chips; parma violets; curry; toffee apples; freshly baked bread; pickled onions; roast chicken. I'm sure you can think of many more.

When you use food in your writing, it doesn't just have to be about the experience of eating it. Like Lara Vapnyar you could have your character shopping for food and preparing and cooking food. Think about all the processes involved in preparing a meal. How will your character feel about pulling the giblets out of a chicken? Or spending ages meticulously removing stones from cherries, or waiting for a soufflé to rise? Who are they thinking about while they are using their fists to knead bread or smashing up meringues for an Eton mess?

We've seen in this month's story how we can bring food to life by talking about how it feels as well as how it looks, tastes and smells. But don't forget to consider how food sounds: the rustle of lettuce; the squeak of cheese; the sizzle of bacon. Writing about food really does call for all the senses.

Think about good food and bad food. Your character may be sitting down to eat a gorgeous feast, but on the other hand they may be eating something that isn't very pleasant. Maybe they are drinking a cup of coffee and the milk is off. Or they've just taken a big bite out of something with Stilton in it and they don't like blue cheese. How does that taste? How does their mouth react to it?


Maybe your character is on a diet or fasting for some reason. How does the lack of food feel? Do they fantasise about food more because they can't have it? How does their body react to hunger? Do they feel weak and light headed? Does their stomach hurt?

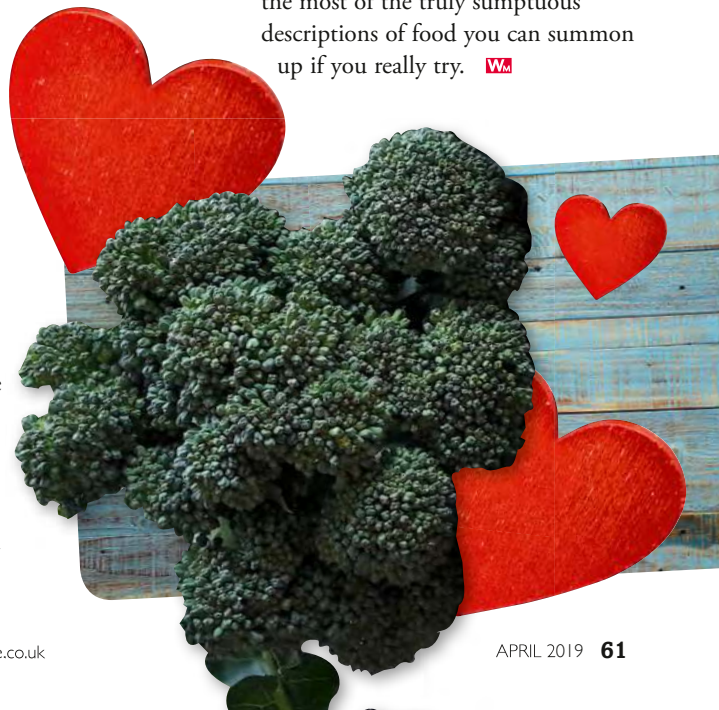
Food can also take you on a cultural journey. Maybe your character is

eating the hottest curry they've ever tasted. Where are they? Different curries have different origins, so be specific. Or perhaps they're in New Orleans and sampling beignets at the Café du Monde. Or they could be eating falafel from a food cart somewhere in the Middle East. Or pizza in Rome. Equally, they could just be at home in their own kitchen trying to conjure up a memory of more exciting times.

If you'd like to have a go at writing a story which features food, here are some prompts to help you.

- Write a story about two people cooking a meal together who both have very different ideas about how it should be done.
- Tell a story that is based on a traditional saying or proverb about food. For example: 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away', 'A watched pot never boils', 'Too many cooks spoil the broth', 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket'.
- Base your story in a restaurant. Two people are having dinner together for the first time and everything that could possibly go wrong does.
- Use a recipe as inspiration for a story. Mix up your characters' motivations, blend their dialogue and turn up the heat on their relationship.

Hopefully this month's master class will have inspired you to use food in a different and creative way in your writing. Don't have your characters eating just because they're hungry and it's lunchtime. Really make the experience of eating integral to the story. And don't forget to make the most of the truly sumptuous descriptions of food you can summon up if you really try. 





In the first of a two-parter on writing irresistible children's fiction, **Amy Sparkes** explores finding your voice

Everyone wants to write that story. The one people are talking about on Twitter. The one publishers are bidding on. The one that won the competition. But how? How do you capture that interest? How do you hook an agent or publisher? Gripping plot and brilliant characters are important, but even more fundamental are two things which underpin it all, and if you don't have these, then your story is unlikely to take off. What are they? A strong voice and a stunning idea.

In this mini-series, learn how to develop both your voice and your story idea to result in a fantastic piece of children's fiction.

What is voice?

If you've ever had feedback, you may have come across phrases like, 'need to develop your writer voice' or 'needs a stronger voice'. What does this mean? Your writer voice is your writing style and is made up of various factors, such as:

- Your use of grammar and sentence structure
- Your use of language
- Your tone
- And, fundamentally, your personality and attitude

How you see the world – your take on life – and your own individual personality will shape your voice. This is why it's absolutely crucial to be yourself when you are writing. Absolutely crucial to be yourself when you are writing. Yes, I said that twice. Because it's important. As soon as you start imitating another writer, you're not actually being true to yourself, and you're actually stifling your own writer's voice. Be inspired by other writers, yes, but never deliberately imitate. Even if

readers cannot quite pinpoint why, it will come across as not exactly right... slightly forced... off-kilter... basically, just not you. And it's you they want to hear.

It's also important to note that if you write different types of fiction, you may have different voices for each style. This is absolutely fine – it's just like tuning in to different sides of your personality.

Why is voice important?

An author's voice is critical. The voice takes you along for the ride, whispers in your ear. A strong voice weaves a magical story-web. There is a confidence – like listening to a strong public speaker, as opposed to someone who speaks to their shoes. An author with a strong voice is confident in knowing what they want to write, and how they want to communicate it.

This voice carries you along the journey. It draws you into the book. And if you read further books by the same author, it can be like meeting up again with an old friend.

So, how do you gain confidence?

This can be tricky, especially when you are starting out or if you aren't naturally confident. Here are some tips:

• **Don't try too hard.** 'Overwriting' is usually quite transparent, so sometimes turning the dial down and writing at a more 'comfortable' level allows a more authentic voice to shine.

• **Be natural.** Don't feel pressurised into writing in a way that doesn't feel like you. For example, if you're writing funny fiction, write things which make *you* smile and laugh.

• **Don't be afraid to be you.** You're marvellous. And there's only one of you. Your voice is unique. That's

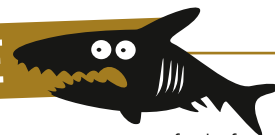
what people want to hear.

• **Don't overedit.** When writing pours out of you, it's more likely to be your natural voice. Editing is a good thing, but if it's done to extremes, you can end up feeling insecure, unconfident and stifling your own voice.

When I wrote the first *Pirate Blunderbeard* book, I was extremely sleep-deprived, getting only one or two hours sleep a night. Consequently, I didn't have much concentration, time or energy, so I just let words tumble out of me without much hesitation or inhibition. When I showed it to people who knew me well, they said, 'This sounds just like you.' They could hear my voice coming through loud and clear because I was just pouring myself into it. The book went to auction.



QUESTIONNAIRE



Answer the following questions to get more a feel of what your voice should be.

1. Which writers inspire you? Who would you like to be compared to?
2. How confident do you feel as a writer? What might increase your confidence?
3. What genre/age group/style of writing interests you?
4. Are there any areas of children's writing which do not appeal to you? (eg age group, genre, etc.)
5. Do you find it easy to write humour?
6. How would you describe your writing? Ask others to describe it. Do the descriptions match?
7. How would you like your writing to be described?
8. What do you imagine yourself writing in future?
9. Describe your personality in three words.
10. Describe your writing in three words. Do the answers have a link with the answers to question 9? If not, why do you think this is?



What kind of voices are children's publishers and agents looking for?

Phrases like, 'looking for new, exciting voices' aren't always very helpful. Yes, agents and publishers are looking for something they haven't quite seen before, but that doesn't always give you much to go on. A rough guide might look something like this:

- Child-friendly – informal, conversational, exciting.
 - Funny – humour (if done in your style) always works well with children.
 - Playful language – dynamic and exciting.
 - Energetic tone – created by word choices which crackle and sparkle.
- Here are two examples of author voice.

Case study: Kristina Stephenson

Read this extract from page three of a brilliant picture book, *Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really BIG Adventure* by Kristina Stephenson, published by Egmont.

*Inside the tower
a windy, windy staircase
didn't stop winding
until it reached
a little wooden door,
right at the very top.*

*And what was behind
That little wooden door?
Well, nobody knew,
Because nobody ever went there.
THE END.*

At least... not until the day when...

So, why does it work so well?
It uses childlike repetition effectively: *a windy, windy staircase/ didn't stop winding.*

The tone is informal and conversational, perfectly suited to engaging young children: *And what was behind/That little wooden door?*

And there's a delightfully mischievous, playfulness to the writing: *Well, nobody knew/Because nobody ever went there/THE END./At least... not until the day when...*

As well as that, the pace and language of the sentence draws the

listener in, as if they were being pulled up that very staircase to come face to face with the little wooden door.

Case Study: Roald Dahl

Now have a look at this descriptive extract from *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl (Puffin):

Aunt Sponge was enormously fat and very short. She had small piggy eyes, a sunken mouth, and one of those white flabby faces that looked exactly as though it had been boiled. She was like a great white soggy overboiled cabbage.

Now, why does this work?

The language is childlike – *piggy, flabby.*

There is humour, comparing James' aunt to a cabbage. And not a particularly nice cabbage at that.

There is a conversational tone – *that looked exactly as though it had been boiled. She was like a great white soggy overboiled cabbage.* The second sentence is like an add-on. As though thoughts in the narrator's mind have just clicked. 'Yes. Yes, that's what she's like: a soggy, overboiled cabbage.' These thoughts are shared instantly with the reader, creating a bond between author and reader. Almost like secrets whispered between friends.

In addition to that, in other places Roald Dahl talks to the reader personally, as in the third paragraph of chapter one: *Now, as you can*


imagine or in the opening of chapter two: *And this thing, which as I say was only rather peculiar, soon caused a second thing to happen which was very peculiar.*

The deliciously dark side of Roald Dahl's voice is apparent throughout his writing. This is seen from page one in *James and the Giant Peach*:

...a terrible thing happened. Both of them suddenly got eaten up (in full daylight, mind you and on a crowded street) by an enormous rhinoceros...

In Roald Dahl's books, people are frequently being *gobbled up, guzzled down, squished to a squash, squashed to a squish*, but done so in such a beautiful, terrible, playful way that we don't seem to mind. You can almost see Roald Dahl rubbing his palms together in delight.

So, be encouraged as you try and find your writer's voice. It's right there waiting for you if you'll give it chance to come out and play.

Next month, we look at how strong ideas are crucial to *The Hook*. In the meantime, here are some tasks to get going with. Enjoy! 

NOW TRY THIS

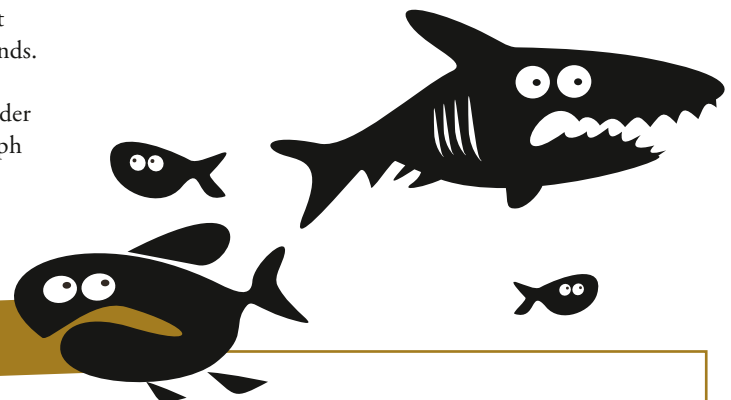
• Create some case studies of your own. Choose a children's book you have enjoyed. Study the author's voice. Ask yourself how exactly does it work so effectively? Look at the things discussed in this article. Can you find them in the author's voice in this text?

• Now try to find another book in the same genre by the same author. Look at the voice in the book. Do you think you could have identified it as the author of the first book you looked at? What are the similarities?

• Look at a few extracts of your own writing. Do they look tonally similar? (if you write different types of fiction, choose pieces

from a similar genre and age-range.) Does it sound like you wrote them? Can you find a hint of you there, somewhere, beneath, behind and between the words?

• Try some freewriting which you do not intend to show anyone. It can be about anything. Just 'talk' to yourself, then put it away without rereading or editing. Do this a few times on separate occasions, then retrieve your writings and reread. Can you hear your voice coming through loud and clear? Do you notice any tonal similarities? Your sense of humour? Way of writing, eg sentence structure? Can you use this exercise to produce a piece of children's fiction truer to your voice?



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BEHIND THE TAPE

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If you have a query for Lisa, please send it by email to enquiries@lisacutts.co.uk

Expert advice to get the details right in your crime fiction, from serving police officer **Lisa Cutts**

Q I am writing a crime novel and my main character is a DCI. He needs to go over financial records for public companies and individuals going back over ten years. How long are records kept and would my DCI have problems finding what he is after?

A Financial records would not be kept indefinitely, so if they are no longer in existence, your DCI wouldn't be able to obtain them. To try to do so, he would need to apply through his police force's Financial Investigation Unit and get a production order for the information, if it still exists.

There may be other options, depending on what your plot needs, but HMRC may have records going back further. If it works for your plot and the companies were public companies, hard copies may be in existence, although in reality, the validity of the records would be called into question if used in court.

Q I have two characters who go shoplifting together. I've heard about the police giving tickets or fines for shoplifting, but I need them to get arrested. Would they still be given a ticket and sent on their way?

A Whether someone is given a fixed penalty notice for shoplifting would depend on the value of the amount they stole and the circumstances. If you want to make sure they're arrested, make it for a substantial amount and have them arrested for conspiracy to steal.

Q Would my police officer character be able to pass information to a friend about a burglary at the friend's house?

A In short, no. It would be seen as a misuse of the police system. If you need your character to get involved in disciplinary proceedings, this would definitely do it. It is, however, unlikely to end well for your police character. If you want to avoid this, simply have your police officer tell the friend to go to the local police station and ask for an update. They should have a crime report or similar reference to show the person at the police station who can give them an update. A great deal of these updates are also provided to victims online if you want to keep it very simple.

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From teaching to arts development, the field of literature offers many freelance opportunities beyond writing articles. **Alex Davis** has advice on life as a literature freelance

When I started thinking about this article, I felt as though one of the important things was to try to deliver a sense of the reality of freelancing within the literature field. It is many things – it's exciting, it's varied, it's energising. It can also be challenging, frustrating, stressful and extremely long hours. Freelancing can look very appealing to many people, but to think of it as an easy option compared to a 9-to-5 job is erroneous. There are times I encounter the old line 'It must be great freelancing! Get up when you want, work in your dressing gown, take a break whenever you like...' My personal experience of freelancing, if anything, is that I get up and start work earlier, finish later and take shorter breaks than I ever did in full-time employment.

With all that said, freelancing can have considerable rewards – although it has to be said it's not for everybody. Which leads me to my first point.

Being independent

The most crucial quality for any freelancer is independence and motivation. In a workplace, there's

typically some pressure, either from peers or managers, to get work done. There is also often a readily available support network. There's also banter and conversation and a social angle in many workplaces.

The moment you go freelance, all that is gone. And having spent a long time working in a large, communal office, the first day of freelancing was certainly a shock to me. It feels deathly quiet and you're absolutely on your own with your projects, whatever they may be. It is a definite jolt that requires a period of adjustment.

It is also the sorest test of your own motivation, especially if you work at home. The TV is far too close by, there are all those books on the shelves, no-one watching over your shoulder if you want to while away some time surfing nonsense on the internet... many people find the shift hard, and if you are someone who genuinely needs pushing and prodding to keep your levels of motivation up, there is a strong chance that freelancing isn't for you.

Ask yourself the question – can I work on my own, and am I the type of person to do it on a regular basis? If the answer is no, then maybe freelancing is something you're better off out of!

Laying the ground

The hardest time in freelancing is likely to be the first few months, where you will be trying to find partners to work with and line up work on a regular basis. The last thing you want to be doing is absolutely starting from scratch, and as such a certain amount of advance preparation is really important. If you're leaping over a cliff with both feet, it's wise to have a look down first.

Here are a few key things you might want to consider by way of preparation for freelancing:

- 1) When you go self-employed, your tax status will change. You'll need to be registered for self-employed tax returns and keep your own records from when you start working for yourself. You can do it a little later on, but it's best not to leave it too long after starting. There's more information on how to do this at <https://writ.rs/selfassessment> and on p68.

- 2) Keeping a regular track of your incomings and outgoings is important – many freelancers keep a spreadsheet for their figures as well as physical copies of invoices, receipts etc. You're also responsible for paying your own taxes, so you'll need to think about putting money aside for that as you go along.

25% is the typically recommended amount, but a little more can be helpful just in case.

3) It's important before you start to have a think about what you can do and what you want to do. While many people are pursuing a dream in freelancing, there can also be jobs (or parts of the job) that you do that you are slightly less keen on, but that will prove very helpful in terms of continuing in your line of work and paying the bills. What skills do you have that you could market, and what is the long-game and ambition that you want to pursue?

4) Have a think about the partners and organisations that you might want to work with. If there are national bodies that you can work with from home, that's great. You might also want to have a look at what local and regional organisations could be of interest to work with, and what plans and ideas you might have for those potential projects and collaborations. It can be useful at this point to consider any travel costs and also the time it might take you to travel also. I made some very long journeys for relatively small amounts of work early on, and I learned quickly that it wasn't worth it once you factored in all the hours getting there.

5) Be sure to organise your space at home. Sitting on a comfy sofa is not always ideal for working, and many people are better off with a proper office, or desk space to work at, which will, to at least some extent, replicate a 'regular' working environment. You might also want to think about some proper space for filing, stationery and so on.

6) Have your approaches ready. The first few months of freelancing are often spent looking to develop partnerships, effectively 'chasing work' – which can be a major part of freelancing. The more you have those proposals written, clear and defined, the more likely those things are to come together quickly and efficiently. Another lesson I learned early on was that 'woolliness' and vagueness get you nowhere. Whatever it is you want to do, be clear what your skills are, why you are the person to do it, the cost/price of doing it (if you need to state it), what you need from

the organisation, what marketing is involved (if any)... Clarity is important in giving the organisation a simple 'yes' or 'no' question to answer. Saying 'let's do a project together' is simply too unspecific, and organisations won't always know exactly what they want or need until it's in front of them!

7) Have a budget prepared. If you're moving from a job into working for yourself, you'll have to be aware that you'll need to earn better, the same or at the very least similar to maintain a similar sort of lifestyle. Be conscious of what you need, and have a think about where that money might come from. Equally, in the early days of self-employment, which can be among the leanest, it can be worth having a think if there are any potential savings you can make on your expenditure to make that changeover from traditionally employed to freelance as smooth as possible.

8) Have something in reserve. Probably one of the most important things is to have some money as a back-up, or maybe a regular project set up for at least the first few months to give you some time to get rolling. If you start off right on the edge financially it can be hugely tricky to keep going, and even if it kicks off going really well it will take time for the first payments to start rolling in. Give yourself something that allows you some sort of financial security in the short-term.

New adventures

The other quality I think is very important for a freelancer is to have a willingness to try new things. The world of literature is a wide one, and there are opportunities to work not only as a fiction writer, but also in creating non-fiction, proofreading, editing, teaching/workshopping, running events, storytelling and performing... If there is something you feel you could have a go at, and feel comfortable to try, then why not give it a whirl? If you don't like it, or don't feel like you delivered quite as well as you wanted, then you're under no obligation to do it again. You might just discover a great new avenue that you really enjoy and/or are very skilled at, and one that also

opens up more options and gives you more certainty in the possibilities of your freelance career.

On these occasions the important things to consider are doing the research – how have other people done similar, and are there any resources out there that can help you to deliver it? – and planning. Think carefully about what you need to deliver that project, what you might need from any organisations you are working with and what will make you feel confident in delivering it and making a good impression. An open mind on what you can do is important. Some nerves are natural when approaching something new, but don't let that stop you taking on exciting opportunities when you make them or when they arrive.

In this piece, we've most explored freelancing and some of the steps and qualities that are required. It's fair to say that it's not for everybody – in fact I have many people tell me they couldn't or wouldn't freelance for all sorts of reasons! But an independent mindset and a strong dose of self-motivation, as well as a willingness to take on new challenges, are all useful qualities to have. It's also vital not to simply launch in, and to survey carefully what your aims are, what skills you have, the sort of work you might want to do, as well as the cold, hard financial realities of the early days of freelancing.

Next time around we're going to take a look at some advice and tips to continue on as a successful freelancer, and how you can ensure a long career as a self-employed worker. [Wm](#)

DISCLAIMER: AT YOUR OWN RISK!

Stepping out of regular employment into freelance work is not for everyone, and carries considerable financial risk! This article is intended as guidance and advice for people looking at the possibility of becoming self-employed. Please consider your own personal and financial circumstances carefully before taking this step, as you would any significant career decision. Neither the author nor *Writing Magazine* accept any responsibility for the effects of any readers going freelance



In, out, in, out, shake it all about!

Simon Whaley dances the self-employed hokey cokey to clarify the latest tax changes for writers

When it comes to the business of writing, there are some aspects we all detest: tax. And if not the payments themselves, then it's the completion of the annual tax return.

In recent years, governments have made several announcements regarding the digitisation and simplification of tax returns, but then changed their minds, only to be followed by further announcements, leaving many writers confused as to what is going on.

So let's do the self-employment hokey cokey to clarify what's in, what's out, and what's still being shaken all about!

Class 2 NI

The success of our writing business has implications for how much and of which class of National Insurance we pay. We can be liable for two types: Class 2 and Class 4 contributions.

Class 2 contributions are only payable if we currently make a profit of more than £6,205 in the year from our writing, and are calculated at the rate of £2.95 a week.

Class 4 contributions are currently payable, at a rate of 9%, on any writing profits over £8,424, and these are calculated when we complete our annual tax return.

Class 2 contributions are important because these are the ones that entitle us to certain benefits, like the state pension.

However, writers making less than £6,205 profit are not liable for Class 2 NI, which means they may have gaps in their National Insurance contributions. This could impact upon future state pension and other benefit entitlements.

To avoid this, it may be advisable to make voluntary Class 2 payments. These used to be collected by direct debit on a monthly basis.

But back in 2015, then-chancellor George Osborne announced that Class 2 contributions would be abolished and self-employed people would qualify for state benefits by paying Class 4 contributions. These changes were planned to take effect from the new 2018/2019 tax year on 5 April 2018, but were later postponed until the next tax year, beginning soon on 5 April 2019.

However, organisations supporting low-income workers, such as the Society of Authors, campaigned against this because it would have penalised writers on extremely low incomes.

Class 4 National Insurance contributions are only paid once you've made a profit of more than £8,424. Writers earning less would not have been liable to pay these contributions and, therefore, the only way to maintain our eligibility to some state benefits would have been to pay the more expensive voluntary Class 3 National Insurance contributions. These are nearly five times greater, at £14.65 a week.

In April 2018, the Society of Authors met with HMRC officials to explain the unfairness of this proposal.

In September 2018, the Government abandoned their plans during this parliament to abolish Class 2 contributions on 5 April 2019.

In a written statement, Robert Jenrick, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury said: 'A significant number of self-employed individuals on the lowest profits would have seen the voluntary payment they make to maintain access to the State Pension rise substantially. Having listened to those likely to be affected by this change we have concluded that it would not be right to proceed during this parliament, given the negative impacts it could have on some of the lowest earning in our society.'

So, in the self-employment hokey cokey game, the abolition of Class 2 contributions is OUT. Therefore, we're still liable for both Class 2 and Class 4 national insurance contributions, which will be collected via the self-assessment system. If you think you'll earn less than the £6,365 earning limit for Class 2 contributions in 2019/2020, you can make voluntary contributions of £3 per week (£156 per year).

Making Tax Digital

Currently, HMRC estimates the government loses £9 billion a year, just through avoidable errors arising during the completion of our tax returns. The Making Tax Digital



scheme is designed to resolve this, while also automating as much of the self-assessment process as possible.

It could be argued that this is a natural progression. After all, many of us manage our banking online, pay bills online, and receive payments from publishers and magazines directly into our bank accounts. Many of our business transactions are already carried out digitally.

Making Tax Digital first hit the headlines in 2015, when the government began consulting stakeholders about their plans. Initially, HMRC were keen for self-employed people with a turnover of £10,000 to enrol in the system. (Turnover is the amount of money a business collects. It is not profit. Profit is what's left over from that income after you've deducted any legitimate business expenses.)

Again, this concerned many writers and umbrella organisations, including the Society of Authors, who were worried that this low threshold for enrolling into the scheme would put an unnecessary burden upon authors and writers. In particular, concern was expressed about the HMRC's plans for a business's financial situation to be updated on a quarterly basis, rather than just annually, through the tax return.

For many of us, completing quarterly tax returns is something we just don't want to think about.

However, quarterly tax returns are not what Making Tax Digital is about. It's about getting existing digital systems talking to one another so that they can update the HMRC records on a quarterly basis, rather than making us complete a quarterly tax return.

Initial plans were for many businesses to join the Making Tax Digital system from April 2018, but this has already been postponed.

HMRC are now splitting the scheme into two: Making Tax Digital for VAT, and Making Tax Digital for Income Tax.

Currently (at the time of writing), only businesses that are VAT-registered and have a taxable turnover of more than the VAT threshold (£83,000) will be required to join the Making Tax Digital for VAT scheme from April 2019. Only if your

writing business is super-successful will you need to worry about this. (Although, if you're that successful you'll probably have an accountant to worry about this for you.)

The introduction of Making Tax Digital for Income Tax is being delayed until at least April 2020. Again, this means in the self-employment hokey cokey game, this current change is OUT for this year, although it could be IN for next year.

But don't put your dancing shoes away just yet. On 22 November 2018, the Parliament's Economic Affairs Committee published a paper outlining their thoughts about the Making Tax Digital process for small businesses. In its summary, it recommended that the government: 'waits until at least April 2022 to implement the next stages of Making Tax Digital, to allow time to learn lessons from the implementation of Making Tax Digital for VAT.'

OUT, But IN

Even though Making Tax Digital for Income Tax is OUT at the moment, HMRC is looking for guinea pigs. So if you fancy being a tax trailblazer you might want to consider joining IN the pilot scheme.

However, you can only do this if your writing business is your only source of income. If you have income from part-time employment, or investments and property, then you'll have to wait until the Making Tax Digital for Income Tax scheme is launched for everyone.

Preparing for IN

Even though Making Tax Digital for Income Tax is not IN yet, it will be IN soon: if not next year, then soon after. So what steps should we be taking now to digitise our writing business?

Firstly, don't go out and buy expensive accounting software. The market is currently developing such software packages, and a list of suitable software can be found on the government websites, which is updated regularly.

However, there's also a commitment from the government that some free software will be available that is suitable for the simplest of small, unincorporated businesses, such as freelance writers, when Making Tax

Digital becomes compulsory.

In the meantime, there are a couple of basic steps we can take, if you haven't done so already:


- Open a separate bank account for your writing income and expenditure. Keeping your personal expenditure separate from your business expenditure will simplify the process, especially as MTD software will probably link directly to your bank account.

- Encourage your customers (publishers and magazines) to pay for your services directly into your bank account. Cheque payments are becoming rarer, but direct payments into your bank account are cheaper for them too.

- Consider setting up a separate PayPal account for your writing business. If you sell your writing overseas, perhaps to foreign magazines or through foreign distributors if you self-publish books, PayPal payments can work out cheaper than direct bank transfers. Just as with your bank account, having separate personal and business PayPal accounts will make things easier in the future.

Benjamin Franklin famously wrote: 'in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.' He could probably have included governments that change their minds.

While the abolition of Class 2 National Insurance appears to have been scrapped for the time being, the government's Making Tax Digital plans are still moving forward, albeit more slowly than originally planned.

When it comes to doing the self-employed hokey cokey, it's clear the music is still playing. Therefore, we need to keep dancing. In this business of writing, it seems HMRC is keen to keep us on our toes! 



Business directory

- Making Tax Digital Overview: <https://writ.rs/makingtaxdigital>
- Joining the Making Tax Digital for Income Tax pilot: <https://writ.rs/pilot>
- Making Tax Digital for Income Tax software: <https://writ.rs/software>
- Self-employed National Insurance Rates: <https://writ.rs/selfni>
- Voluntary National Insurance: <https://writ.rs/volni>

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Citizen science projects

Participate in scientific research projects with advice from research expert **Tarja Moles**

Citizen science projects are activities that allow volunteers, regardless of whether they have a scientific background or not, to take part in scientific research. They are set up by a wide variety of organisations and, hence, there are all sorts of projects that you can take part in: for example, you could count butterflies in your back garden, identify different breeds in mixed-breed dog photos online or photograph cloud formations. There are activities that can be done at home, while you're on holiday or entirely online. What's common to all the different types of projects, however, is that you, as a volunteer, can contribute to building huge data sets that researchers would not otherwise be able to collect.

As a writer, taking part in a citizen science project can give you both new data and new experiences that you can incorporate into your writing. If you'd like to have a go, here's a brief lowdown on how to get started.

Finding a suitable project

There are thousands of citizen science projects out there. The majority are in one way or another related to the research of the natural world, but there are plenty of other topics to choose from as well.

There's no one place where you can look at all the available projects, but there are certain useful websites that you can explore. For example, Wikipedia has a long list of citizen science projects (<https://writ.rs/citizenscienceprojectswiki>) while the National Geographic (<https://writ.rs/citscinatgeo>) and the Guardian (<https://writ.rs/citsciguardian>) also have their respective selections on their websites.

Scistarter (<https://scistarter.com>) is a user-friendly site as it has a project finder search engine that's ideal for making sure that the results list will display matches that fit your exact criteria. In addition to a straightforward keyword search, you can set additional preferences, including selecting projects by topic and/or type of activity (eg whether it takes place online, indoors, outdoors,

at night). You can also specify at whom the projects are aimed (eg children, adults, seniors). Please note that many of the projects on Scistarter have been set up by US-based organisations so not all will be suitable for people in the UK. However, there are plenty of projects that take place online and/or have a global focus.

If you're specifically looking for UK-based projects, have a look at what the Natural History Museum (<https://writ.rs/citscinathist>) and the BioBlitz (www.bnhc.org.uk/bioblitz) have to offer.

Participating in a project

Each citizen science project is different and requires different levels of commitment and skill. When you are choosing your project, read through not only the project description but also the specific requirements (if there are any). Some projects may allow you to dip in whenever it suits you. Certain transcription projects, such as the one where volunteers transcribe historical weather logs captured at the Canadian McGill weather observatory (<https://citsci.geog.mcgill.ca>), fall into this category. Other projects may require you to count bugs in your back garden every day for a month or stay up all night looking for bats. Make sure that you can make the appropriate time commitment before you sign up.

It's also important to find out if any specialist skills or equipment are required. If you're not sure whether you have these skills, you can always contact the organisers and ask for advice.

Once you do commit to a project, always follow the instructions to the letter and report your honest answers – even if you expected your findings to be something different from what they turn out to be.

Setting up your own project

Before you attempt to start your own project, take part in a number of existing projects, preferably covering a wide range of subject areas and performing a variety of tasks. This will help you get more concrete

ideas regarding how your project might work and how to go about setting it up in the first place.

Once you feel that you're ready to get going, start by putting in place a robust plan. What do you want to find out? How are you going to achieve this? How will you recruit and engage volunteers? How will you analyse the data? Before you publicise your project, you need to have thought out all the different aspects clearly and put all the necessary logistics in place.

To get started with your planning, read citizen science guides. One useful guide has been prepared by UK Environmental Observation Network (<https://writ.rs/citsciguide>). Although this guide focuses on the topics of biodiversity and environment, the main principles can be applied to other contexts as well. If you need help, contact other people and/or organisations who have set up projects before. You can find them online.

Although planning your project can be a challenge, another big challenge will be to recruit enough volunteers to take part. Social media is an excellent tool for asking people to join. Articles or letters to the editor in local newspapers may also help if your topic focuses on a local area or community. Don't ignore the people-engagement aspect when you're planning your project: networking is hugely important to its success.

Citizen science projects are great fun. If you've never participated before, give it a try. You never know where it'll take you and what you'll find! [Writ.rs](https://writ.rs)

Tips for and experiences of developing your own citizen science project:

- A Scientist's Guide to Citizen Science: <https://writ.rs/sciguide>
- Tips for Citizen Scientists: <https://writ.rs/scitips>
- Engaging Volunteers: <https://writ.rs/volunteers>

Editorial calendar

Strong forward planning will greatly improve your chances with freelance submissions. Here are some themes to consider for the coming months.



1 July

The first Sony Walkman was released 40 years ago.



20 July

Fifty years ago, US astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin became the first people to walk on the moon.

21 July

Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party 25 years ago.



25 July

The SR-NI hovercraft made its first Channel crossing from Dover to Calais 60 years ago.

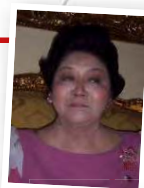


27 July

The world's first commercial jet airliner, the de Havilland Comet, flew its maiden flight 70 years ago.

Celebrity celebrations

- 2 July:** Former Filipino First Lady and shoe amasser Imelda Marcos was born 90 years ago
- 7:** Jon Pertwee, the third *Dr Who* and only Worzel Gummidge, was born 100 years ago
- 20:** Mountaineer Edmund Hilary, with Tenzing Norgay the first men to climb Mount Everest, was born 100 years ago.
- 21:** American writer Ernest Hemingway was born 120 years ago.
- 22:** Actor Terence Stamp will be 80.
- 23:** Harry Potter actor Daniel Radcliffe was born 30 years ago.
- 24:** Singer and actor Jennifer 'J.Lo' Lopez will be 50.
- 28:** US First Lady, socialite and style icon Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was born 90 years ago.
- 31:** Italian writer, chemist and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi was born 100 years ago.

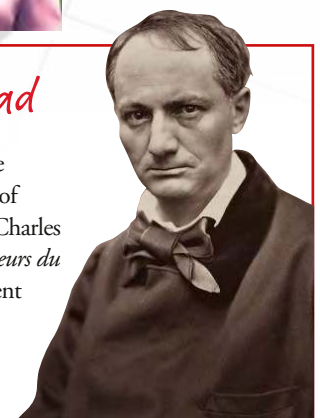


30 July

Princess Diana opened the Landmark Aids centre in London 25 years ago.

Looking ahead

April 2021 will mark the bicentenary of the birth of French poet and writer Charles Baudelaire, whose *Les Fleurs du Mal* is a classic of decadent literature. How has contemporary decadent writing moved on?





ON THE MOVE

Learn how to create animated gifs with PC trainer **Greta Powell**

If you're looking to liven up your social media pages or website then quite often a gif is the answer. This month we look at how they can be created quickly and easily in either Photoshop or by using one of the many apps available online. We'll also touch on how to create graphics that work properly, sizewise, in social media posts.

Q My passion is writing, not computers but more and more the two seem to be converging into one another. I have paid to have my books self-published and had them uploaded to a number of websites in both digital and print formats. I now want to advertise them on Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites using images and contact details but I really don't have time to find out all the different post sizes or learn new complex software. How I can achieve this and what software I would need?

A Probably the easiest option for you is to create a Canva account (www.canva.com). This contains pre-determined templates or sized layouts for virtually everything you can think of including Twitter posts, LinkedIn Hero images, Facebook banners and more. As these are all pre-sized layouts for specific media posts you don't have to learn individual sizes. Once you have selected the one you want you can then customise it to suit your message using either free or paid graphic assets on Canva. If you can't find anything individual enough to suit your taste you can also easily upload graphics to use. Canva is so easy to use and there is a very large choice of fonts and images available to use, making it a very flexible and attractive option.

Q I currently use Photoshop for all my online images including banners and headers and also to enhance and retouch my photographs. In fact, it does everything I need except create animated gifs which I would like to start including on my social media pages. What would be the best software to purchase to do this in, Premier Pro or After Effects?

A Actually, you don't need to purchase any more additional software whatsoever because Photoshop will create some quite stunning gifs for you. It comes complete with its own timeline so it's useful for editing video and other animations such as gifs.

To create a gif you need to have a series of layers containing varying content. For argument's sake you may want to animate a book cover by changing its colour. To do this you need to have Photoshop active then go the Window menu and turn on the timeline, which will appear at the bottom of the Photoshop screen. Make sure you click on Create Frame Animation on the button in the middle of the timeline.

For the book example, each layer will contain a different coloured cover and each layer needs to have its own frame which is created by clicking on New Frame on the Timeline. The different coloured book covers will then appear horizontally across the Timeline and by clicking on each one you will see the animation form. There are further options on the Timeline that control both the speed and flow of the animation.


This is an excellent tutorial that guides you step by step through the

process of creating gifs as described above and also how to create one from video <https://writ.rs/photoshopgif> or if you prefer a video tutorial take a look at this one on <https://writ.rs/gifvid>.

Q I have a lot of files which were typed out and formatted in Microsoft Word and now I want to bring them into InDesign to export to ebooks and Kindle. I did use my own designed styles in Word and would like to keep these in InDesign. Each time I copy and paste the text across it loses the styles and just pastes as plain text. Is there any way to do this?

A This is a frequent query, usually because people want to bring their legacy text across from Microsoft Word. Whenever you copy and paste text from a word processor into InDesign the styles and formats are automatically discarded. What you need to do is open InDesign, go to the File menu and choose Place from the list commands. Once the Place box opens choose the required file from the drive then click OK.

Back in InDesign you will see your cursor fill with text and you can then flow the text through the document either by clicking and drawing out text frames or holding down the Shift key and clicking the mouse to flow text through the whole document.

Take a look at this video, which although quite old, does explain the whole process of text flows, otherwise known as text threading: <https://writ.rs/textimport> 

Quick tip!

You can also convert Word documents to both ebooks and Kindle (azw files) by using Calibre, which is a complete ebook management system available for free download from <https://calibre-ebook.com/>

If you have a technical or computer query for Greta, please email info@gretapowell.com or use the website contact form at www.gretapowell.com/contact

Additional software

If you don't have Photoshop there are a number of other options including www.easygifanimator.net which is aimed at Windows users and very straightforward to use. This is a versatile piece of software and not bad value for money at just under £30. There are a number of other alternatives some of which are free and some available for a small charge at <https://writ.rs/gifcreators>.

FIONA ERSKINE

The thriller writer tells **Adrian Magson** how a skiing accident prompted her explosive debut



Most people wouldn't be thankful for a skiing accident followed by surgery for giving them the kick to start writing. But Fiona Erskine, from Teesside, is one who can, as she sees her debut thriller, *The Chemical Detective*, published by Point Blank this month.

'In 2012,' she explains, 'after the accident and waiting to recover sufficiently to fly home, I was sharing space in a bar with some Russian men and staring out at the slopes, and the character of Jacqueline "Ja" Silver came to me with a story I just had to tell.'

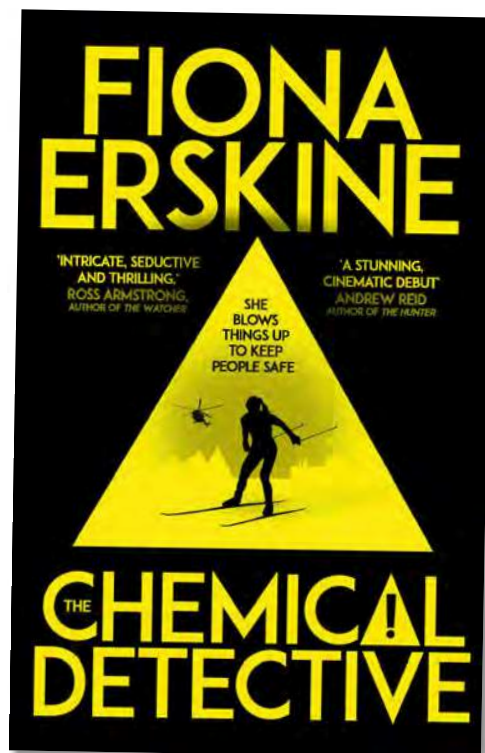
The theme centres around the illegal trade in chemicals and explosives. Jaq complains about an irregularity in a consignment while working on avalanche control in Slovenia, only for the evidence to mysteriously disappear. She is subsequently threatened, accused of incompetence, and narrowly escapes death and is framed for murder.

Like her character, Jaq, Fiona is a chemical engineer and lives in Teesside. She travels extensively to work abroad, including Brazil, Russia, India and China. But she's quick to point out that the resemblances end there; she has had a life very different to that of her heroine, who had a traumatic childhood, picks fights, skis expertly and has serious commitment issues, whereas Fiona had a

peaceful, loving childhood and has been in love with her husband, Jonathan, since they met in 1982.

The background of Fiona's work, in a predominantly male world, clearly helps with the atmosphere and detail for her books. 'When I started, I was the first female among hundreds of men. But working night shifts in Leith docks, which was rough when the ships came in, was a great experience. Since then I've worked with female scaffolders in China, female construction labourers in India and female scientists technicians and engineers the world over.' In addition, the current fears of chemical warfare and terrorist attacks echoed in her book is backed up by her knowledge and experience in handling dangerous chemicals. She admits to having supervised the demolition of several factories, but never blowing them up. 'My working life has been devoted to avoiding explosions by careful control of the hazards,' she says. 'But it's far more memorable to read stories about things that go wrong!'

A school trip to Ukraine and Russia,



FIONA'S TOP TIPS

- Write lots – no writing is wasted.
- Don't bore family and friends. Find a writers' group.
- Craft matters but passion beats craft; make your reader care.
- Read lots – inside and outside your genre.

followed by studying Russian history and language, gave her a love of the former Soviet Union, and explains why the book opens in Slovenia, followed by locations in Chernobyl, Belarus and Poland, among others.

The book took six years to write and edit, and left plenty of material to spare. 'For me, writing is a way of making sense of the world around me. It's also an escape from the day job as well as filling in the hours away from home. I have enormous fun weaving plots around my characters, who come first, running off around the world and picking fights, and it's great fun skiing expertly and fighting injustice while tucked up in bed!'

A huge fan of Bond films (although not the disposable women), Fiona cites Daniel Craig as bringing gravitas to the role, but Sean Connery in *From Russia with Love* is her all-time favourite. As with her own writing, the backdrop in the films play an important part, such as the opening chase scene (a building site) in *Casino Royale*, and Istanbul and Venice in *From Russia with Love*.

Her reading, too is important. 'I devoured every Graham Greene novel as a teenager and many of the Russian greats; loved *War and Peace* – although not *Anna Karenina* – and Dickens. I only started reading thrillers when I tried to write one, to see where I'd gone wrong. Now I adore Lionel Davison, Robert Harris, John le Carré and Lee Child.'

Jaq's next adventures take her to China, then Brazil, and maybe India. **Ww**



**TAP
HERE**

To purchase
The Chemical
Detective

Away from your desk

Get out of your garret for some upcoming activities and places to visit

Back soon!



Meet WM at LBF!

Come along and say hello to the WM team at our stand at the London Book Fair between 12 and 14 March.

Website: www.londonbookfair.co.uk



Babel: Adventures in Translation

Explore the power of translation in the development of ideas at this exhibition at the Bodleian Libraries until 2 June.

Website: <https://writ.rs/babel>



Hay House Writers' Workshop

Learn how to write and publish a mind, body, spirit title in Dublin on 27 and 28 April – and one participant will win a Hay House publishing contract with a €5,000 advance.

Website: www.hayhouse.co.uk/writers-workshop-dublin-2019



The Self Publishing Conference

The UK's only dedicated self-publishing event is back for a seventh year on 27 April at the University of Leicester's Stamford Court Conference Centre.

Website: www.selfpublishingconference.org.uk

The Writer's Roadmap

Join Jen Campbell, Michael Donkor and Benjamin Johncock at the National Centre for Writing in Norwich on 27 April for an inspiration day for writers at all stages of their careers.

Website: <https://writ.rs/writersroadmap>



Adichie – 1 Day Creative Writing Course for Black Women and Women of Colour

A one-day workout from Rewrite named after Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie to give you the tools to inspire your work and keep you writing.

Website: www.rewritelondon.com

Navigating Otherness: A Creative writing Course

Sharlene Teo leads an exploratory six-week course at Southbank Centre, starting on 24 April, on writing from different perspectives than our own.

Website: <https://writ.rs/otherness>





WRITERS' NEWS

Your essential monthly round-up of competitions, paying markets, opportunities to get into print and publishing industry news.

Trouble in Womagland

Patsy Collins



The January issue of *Spirit & Destiny* (S&D) magazine promised to help readers enrich their wellbeing and thrive in all they do. For writers, however, they were less generous, announcing in the same month they would taking all rights, including moral rights, for the fiction they publish.

Features editor Tracie Couper told the Womagwriter blog: 'Any article appearing in the magazine will require the writer/contributor to sign an agreement, giving us all rights to the article/story/feature. This is because *Spirit & Destiny* is now syndicated in other countries, including Australia and New Zealand.'

Tracie added that the agreement was drawn up by Bauer's legal team, and would apply to all the company's publications.

All-rights contracts mean that authors cannot use their work again in any way, including publishing it in their own collections or having it adapted for others forms such as stage or film. They can not claim ALCS payments and do not have the right to be credited as the author. Many writers find such terms unacceptable and will not submit under them.

Notably for womag short story writers, Bauer Media owns *Take a Break's Fiction Feast* (TABFF). Requests for clarification from the fiction editor at TABFF and Bauer Media as a whole elicited only an official statement: 'Bauer Media greatly values the breadth and diversity of content we're able to offer our consumers through working with freelancers. We introduced standard terms for works from

freelancers (including photographers) for all our magazines a number of years ago. As a global media company, the majority of Bauer Media's brands operate across multiple platforms, including magazines, websites, live events, TV and radio stations. To that end, we require contract terms with the freelancers we commission to enable us to re-use commissioned material across other brands, digital platforms, international editions and any new ways its consumers choose to engage with brand content.'

Not all publications which have a global reach and publish across multiple formats impose all rights contracts on their authors. Bauer representatives were able to explain why they would not take that approach, nor whether *Take a Break* would continue to operate under its current, more reasonable, terms.

In contrast to their statement, introducing all-rights contracts actually reduces the 'breadth and diversity of content': authors including Julie Day, Carrie Hewlett and S Bee, who have all recently had work published in TABFF, will no longer write for them. Other writers yet to be published have also chosen not to submit in future.

The change of policy by Bauer echoes a similar move from publishing multinational TI Media, who started taking all rights on their titles, including *Woman's Weekly* and its *Fiction Special*, in 2018. Many writers chose then to boycott those titles, with a knock-on effect of increased submissions for editors elsewhere. *YOU* magazine in South Africa has just closed to submissions for six months. Lynn Ely, fiction editor told Womagwriter, 'It's because I have more stories than I know what to do with.'

Fortunately for writers, not all publishers impose all-rights contracts. DC Thomson, which owns *The People's Friend*, *The Weekly News* and *My Weekly* are the biggest publishers of women's fiction.

Shirley Blair, fiction editor at *The People's Friend* (see p77), said, 'At the moment there are no plans to change the terms of the contract that the *Friend* currently offers to writers. Publishing is an ever evolving business, and several years ago we re-examined our contributor contracts to clarify our rights in relation to new media. We spent a long time and did a lot of work on coming up with a contract that we hope is as fair as possible to the writers in that the copyright remains with them, while at the same time allowing us the rights we need.'

Wing it for the The Moth



The Moth Short Story Prize 2019 is inviting entries.

The competition, for stories up to 5,000 words, has a first prize of €3,000. The second prize is a week-long writing retreat at Circle of Misse in France, including €250 travel expenses, and the third prize is €1,000. The winning entry will be published in *The Moth*. This year's judge is Kit de Waal.

Entries may be in any style and on any

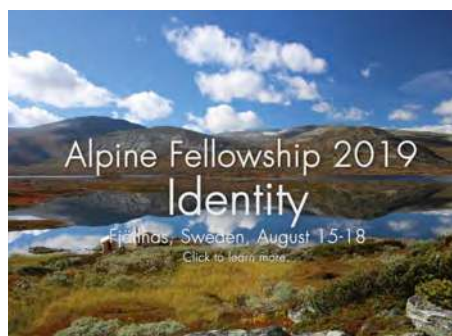
subject, but must be original and previously unpublished. Send entries typed on single sides of A4. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript.

Enter online or by post. Postal entrants should include an entry form, which may be downloaded from the website.

The entry fee is €15, payable by cheques made out to The Moth Magazine Ltd or via the online submission form.

The closing date is 30 June.

Details: *The Moth Short Story Prize*, *The Moth*, Ardan Grange, Milltown, Belturbet, Co Cavan, Ireland H14 K768; website: www.themothmagazine.com



IDENTIFY WITH THIS FELLOWSHIP

Applications are invited for the 2019 Alpine Writing Fellowship.

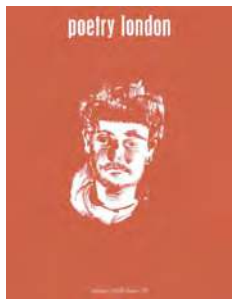
The winning writer will receive £10,000. The second prize is £3,000 and the third prize is £2,000. The three prizewinners will be invited to the 2019 Alpine Fellowship Annual Symposium in Fjällnäs in Sweden between 15 and 18 August, where poet John Burnside will present the award.

To enter, send an original, unpublished piece of writing up to 2,500 words on the topic of 'identity', which is the theme of the Symposium. Entry is free. Writers may submit one piece only.

The closing date is 1 April.

Website: <https://alpinefellowship.com/>

Cloze your way to the top of the poetry pile



Poetry London is inviting entries for the *Poetry London* Cloze Prize 2019, which has Sasha Dugdale as its judge.

The first prize is £5,000. The second prize is £2,000, and the third, £1,000.

Four commended

poets will each win £500. All the winning poems will be published in *Poetry London*.

Enter original, unpublished poems up to 80 lines. Type entries clearly on single sides of A4. The poet's name must not appear on the manuscript. Enter through the online submission system.

The entry fee is £7 per poem, or £3 for *Poetry London* subscribers, payable by cheques made out to Poetry London, or through PayPal.

The closing date is 1 May.

Details: email: competition.entry@poetrylondon.co.uk; website: <http://poetrylondon.co.uk/>

UK MAGAZINE MARKET

A feelgood Friend

Tina Jackson



The People's Friend is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

'I think the secret of its success is the bond it has with its readers,' said editor Angela Gilchrist. 'It's loved passionately by the people who read it, and they regard it as their magazine, and a friend to them.'



Throughout the weekly's long history, it has aimed to be a companion to its readers. 'Right from the beginning, it was a big aim – to be a friend to the women of Victorian Britain, providing advice, and help, and support, as well as providing entertainment, and characters that people thought they could turn to,' said Angela. 'We're still true to those founding principles, and being there for our readers.'

The People's Friend is always intended as a warm, comforting read. 'We're very dedicated to talking about the good things in life so

that our readers are going to feel positive and uplifted – we want to make people feel better. It's a friend – you spend time with someone because you enjoy their company.'

A lot of time and effort goes into keeping in the loop of what readers want. 'We foster that bond – people are encouraged to write it, and they do, and tell us what the *Friend* means to them and what they'd like to see in it,' said Angela. 'We do carry out research, focus groups, just to make sure we continue to meet people's needs. But really it's by listening and trying to give them the magazine they want, not what we think they should have.'

The readership is mainly woman – about 12% are male. The average reader age is 60-plus. Keeping the magazine relevant to its readers is also essential. 'We've looked at the history in great detail, and *The People's Friend* is not afraid to reinvent itself! In the early days it was designed to be read by the whole family. Then in WWI there was a real shift when the men went to war and women were left at home to cope. *The Friend* became very practical, with lots of advice, from DIY to how to deal with a solicitor. During WWII there was a great deal about rationing and food shortages – women coping with their families. Now our readership has become a little bit older. It's interesting to see how *The Friend* has reinvented itself to suit each particular generation that comes along. A story we print now might be very different from one we might have had forty years ago. We don't dwell on things in the outside world but we do reflect the world we live in.'

Fiction has always been important to *The Friend*. 'In the beginning, when *The People's Friend* was founded in Dundee, there was *The People's Journal*, and its proprietor believed in the improving power of literature, so he produced *The Friend*. It was 50% fiction, and we still do that.'

It takes a very specific kind of story to appeal to *Friend* readers. 'A good story for *The People's Friend* has to make you feel better for having read it,' said Angela. 'It has to have a fresh voice and believable characters. It mustn't fall into the trap of stereotypes. The characterisation is key.'

The doors are wide open for writers new to the magazine. 'Anybody can try writing for us. We have an open submissions policy, and we provide loads of great advice. Some people will try for years and some will be accepted very quickly. My advice is to keep trying and don't think you know better than the people who are buying your story. To write for *The Friend*, you need to have a good idea, or something fresh to say, or a fresh way of saying something. A team of four people work exclusively on the fiction and they want people to succeed, so it's worth following their advice.'

Getting a *Friend* story right isn't always easy. 'One of the biggest mistakes is to focus on the sad and depressing,' said Angela. 'People don't want to read stories set in care homes or about dementia. Even if you are in a home, you're looking for escapism. The other big mistake is writing characters that are not likeable.'

The secret ingredient is the warmth *The Friend* prides itself on. 'I would suggest there's nothing wrong with being cosy – that it might mean comforting, warm, safe and secure,' said Angela. 'There is a place for something that makes you feel better.'

The starting rate for a story is £80, no matter what length. After seven acceptances it goes up to £95, and the top rate is £110.

Details: The Fiction Team, *The People's Friend*, F+DC Thomson & Co Ltd, 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 9QJ; email: peoplesfriend@dcthomson.co.uk; website: www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk

FLASHES

love it! weekly women's magazine welcomes real-life stories, pays £50 for a best tip, £25 for lookalike pictures and has a variety of cash-prize puzzles.

Details: email: editor@loveitmagazine.co.uk; website: www.loveitmagazine.co.uk

People's Poetry group meets at Milford-on-sea Community Centre in Hampshire on alternate months on a Wednesday at 7pm to 10pm. Bring your own and favourite poems to read and share. **Contact Jenny Rose. Tel: 01590 645739.**

Boundless is a bi-monthly membership club magazine for civil servants and public sector workers. It is edited by Alex Drew. **Details:** email: info@boundless.co.uk; website: www.boundless.co.uk

At 27, Sally Rooney is the youngest-ever winner of the Costa Novel, with *Normal People*, which also won the Waterstones Book of the Year last November.

Have your say on rural issues at *BBC Countryfile* magazine, edited by Fergus Collins. There are gifts for the writer of Letter of the Month. **Details:** email: editor@countryfile.com; website: www.countryfile.com/magazine/

'You need to take out the stuff that's just sitting there and doing nothing. No slackers allowed! All meat, no filler!' **Stephen King**

GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Blended voices

The Blend is a new Australian online and print magazine which needs to find 'unique voices and points of view and deliver those viewpoints through the medium of short stories'. The magazine aims to blend different stories to allow the reader's imagination 'to not only be challenged but be enlightened'.

Open to submissions of fiction and poetry, the team seek fiction between 2,500 and 7,000 words. Poetry is 'preferred no longer than fifty lines.' Submit three poems. These are no taboo subjects but some concepts will be harder to sell unless written expertly. Spend time at the website, read the details of why the magazine exists and what the editors like. This is an unusual magazine and the team know what they want.

Submit a doc, docx or rtf file by email: submissions@theblendinternational.com.au

Response time is 'quick'. There is a fee for submissions, which the editors explain is to support a decent fee for acceptances. Alternatively, support *The Blend* by subscribing and submit for free. Payment is \$200 for fiction and \$25 for poetry, paid on publication via PayPal for 'first international English rights in print and ebook versions with all rights returned six months after publication.'

Website: <https://theblendinternational.com.au>

Prizes galore at Yeovil

The 2019 Yeovil Literary Prize is open for entries.

The annual prize is in four categories:

- **Novel:** For an extract up to 15,000 words including a synopsis. The first prize is £1,000, the second £250 and the third, £100. This year's judge is Vaseem Khan. The entry fee is £12.

- **Short story:** For stories up to 2,000 words. The first prize is £500, the second, £200 and the third, £100. The judge is Laura Williams and the entry fee is £7.

- **Poetry:** For poems up to forty lines. The first prize is £500, the second £200 and the third £100. The judge is Philip Goss and the entry fee is £7 for one poem, £10 for two and £12 for three.

- **Writing without restrictions:** The first prize is £200, the second £100 and the third, £50. The judge is Chris Redmond and the entry fee is £5.

There is also a *Western Gazette* Best Local Writer Award for the best shortlisted entry by a writer in the paper's distribution area.

All entries must be original and commercially unpublished. Short story entries should include a wordcount. Enter online or by post. Postal entries should be single-sided and accompanied by a completed entry form, which may be downloaded from the website. Pay the entry fees by PayPal or cheques made out to YCAA Literary Section.

The closing date is 31 May.

Details: Yeovil Literary Prize Competition, The Octagon Theatre, Hendford, Yeovil BA20 1UX; website: www.yeovilprize.co.uk



BAME the best for Borough Press

The Borough Press has teamed up with The Good Literary Agency for submissions for unagented BAME writers, with the winner receiving a £10,000 publishing contract, representation from The Good Agency and mentoring from writer Nikesh Shukla.

Borough Press assistant editor Ore Agbaje-Williams said: 'The different backgrounds and heritages of our society are under-represented in various areas across the media, including publishing, and The Borough Press is hugely committed to enabling more of these voices to be heard. That's why open submissions periods like these for BAME writers are important. To make clear to agents, writers, future editors, and the industry that there is a place for these writers, there are readers who want them. I'm delighted that we can take steps to bring those writers and their stories to a wider audience with The Good Literary Agency.'

The open submission period is for literary and literary-commercial novels by BAME writers not represented by a literary agent. Send the first three chapters, or up to fifty pages, of an unpublished novel (no more than 10,000 words); a 500-word synopsis plus a one-paragraph summary of the novel; a short list of the main characters and a one-page author biography. Send three doc attachments (manuscript, synopsis and author biography) in a single email, including full contact details and ethnicity in the body of the email. The author's name and novel title should be included in the file names, email subject line and on every page of each document. Do not send children's or YA fiction, genre novels or non-fiction.

The closing date is 31 March.

Website: www.boroughpress.co.uk/



UK BOOK MARKET

Call from Polis

Jenny Roche

An independent publishing company founded in 2013 Polis Books is actively looking for new and established authors for their growing list and aims to 'introduce readers to brand new voices as well as invigorate the careers of talented authors who deserve a wider readership, whether it is in print, digital or both'.

Currently there are thirteen categories of fiction the publisher is seeking to acquire in addition to humour/essays, sports and pop culture non-fiction titles. Novels under 60,000 words are rarely considered. See website for full details. Not being sought at the moment are graphic novels, stand-alone novellas and short stories, poetry and children's picture and colouring books.

Every writer published is considered a long-term investment in both their future as well as that of Polis Books. Each author is worked with hand-in-hand to produce their book and advances against royalties are offered.

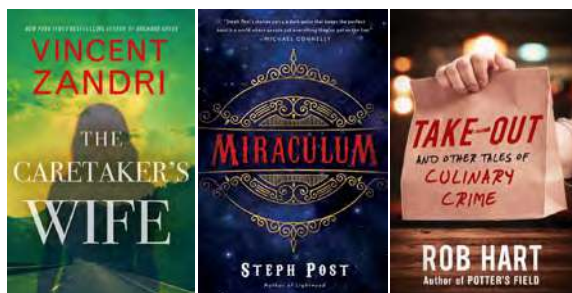
Submissions should consist of a query letter, three sample chapters and an author biography in which you can include information on any personal blog or social media presence you have. Submit your work as an email attachment. Due to the high volume of unsolicited submissions you will only gain a response if there is interest in your submission.

No submission criteria on this just yet but Polis Books founder Jason Pinter has recently launched Agora Books, a diversity-focused imprint devoted to crime and noir fiction. The first three books, all from debut authors, are to be launched this autumn.

'Agora will offer a diverse roster of authors, whose books will explore culture, gender, sexuality, society, economy, and politics,' says Jason. Keep a check on the Polis Books website for any further news.

Email Polis Books submissions to: submissions@polisbooks.com

Website: www.polisbooks.com



Big chance with Bath Novel

The Bath Novel Award is open for entries of manuscripts for adult or young adult readers by unpublished, self-published and independently published novelists.

The winner will receive £2,500, literary agent introductions and manuscript feedback. The runner up will get literary introductions and feedback, and the longlist prize winner will receive an online place on Cornerstones Literary Consultants' course Edit Your Novel the Professional Way (worth £1,800). The judge will be literary agent Hellie Ogden of Janklow & Nesbit.

To enter, send the first 5,000 words of an original, completed novel over 50,000 words in any genre, plus a one-page synopsis. Longlisted writers will be asked to submit their completed manuscript by 30 June.

Manuscripts may be submitted by unpublished, self-published and independently published writers. Writers with a traditional publishing deal (ie, one with an advance) are not eligible.

Double space the novel extract in 12pt font. The synopsis should be single spaced. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Online entries should be sent as doc, docx or pdf files. Postal entrants should send a cover sheet with full contact details.

The entry fee is £25 per novel, payable by PayPal or bank transfer, or cheques payable to The Bath Novel Award.

The closing date is 2 June.

Details: The Bath Novel Award, PO Box 5223, Bath BA1 0UR; email: info@bathnovelaward.co.uk; website: <https://bathnovelaward.co.uk>



It's a Funny Old World

by Derek Hudson

The late Terry Pratchett was commended for his wit by Paul Bejdyk – writing for the Quora website – who provided examples:

- 'We're witches and we will pay our way by curing you of any irritating ailments you have.'
- 'I don't have any.'
- 'How many would you like?'

- 'People who are rather more than six feet tall and nearly as broad across the shoulders often have uneventful journeys. People jump out at them from behind rocks then say things like, "Oh. Sorry. I thought you were someone else."'

- 'The complete carcass of a whole roast pig looked extremely annoyed at the fact that someone had killed it without waiting for it to finish its apple.'

- Both the inky trade and its online counterparts still have their share of errors, Ireland's *Daily Edge* confirmed... including:

'Readers may have noticed that the *Valley News* misspelled its own name on yesterday's front page... let us say for the record: We sure feel silly.'

'Due to a typing error Saturday's story on local artist Jon Henninger mistakenly reported that that his bandmate Eric Lyden was on drugs. The story should have read that Lyden was on drums. *The Sentinel* sincerely regrets the error.'



- The Interesting Literature website selected the following title as one of their favourites in Bizarre Books, which is edited by Russell Ash and Brian Lake: 'Why Not Eat Insects?'

'Why not indeed? Vincent M Holt certainly saw nothing wrong with a bit of entomophagy in his

1885 cookbook, which contains, among others, recipes for snail soup, curried cockchafer, and moths on toast. Yum.'

- Facebook's Unknown Punster: 'Someone ripped the pages from both ends of my dictionary. Now it just goes from bad to worse.'

- Stephen King on working: 'When asked "How do you write?" I invariably reply "One word at a time.'

FLASHES

Today's Railways monthly magazine is published by Platform 5 and edited by Robert Pritchard. He welcomes ideas from interested writers.

Details: email: robert.pritchard@platform5.com; website: www.platform5.com

Daily Mail cartoonist Mac has retired aged 82. His replacement, Paul Thomas, is 57.

Naomi House and Jackspace News celebrates 21 years of caring for children and young adults and welcomes feedback. **Details:** email: hello@naomihouse.org.uk; website: www.naomihouse.org.uk

The Sun newspaper now pays £50 for the star letter of the day. **Details:** email: letters@thesun.co.uk; website: www.thesun.co.uk

Wetherspoon News free quarterly magazine is edited by Eddie Gershon. Letter writers get £20 gift cards. **Details:** email: editor@jdetherspoon.co.uk; website: www.jdwetherspoon.com

The New Milton Mail, edited by Gary Prince, is a free monthly local magazine for that area of Hampshire. **Details:** email: hello@localliving.uk; website: <https://localliving.uk/>

'Writing a novel is hard. Writing a novel for the first time is harder.'
Jericho Writers

GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Craft is everything

Jenny Roche

Fiction, writing craft essays, interviews and book reviews are all wanted for *Craft* magazine which although based in Oregon, USA is open to submissions from both emerging and established writers around the world.

'We focus on the craft of writing and how the elements of craft make a good story shine,' says editor in chief Katelyn Keating. 'Each published story will include an editor's introduction as well as a craft note from the author.'

Flash fiction submissions should be a maximum of 1,000 words and short fiction no more than 6,000 words. Critical essays range from 500-5,000 words and are a 'careful examination of an element of craft'. Interviews should be with writers focusing on the craft of writing and book reviews of 700-1,000 focus on forthcoming titles, particularly if the writer explicitly explores craft

in their work. The website has content which can be read online.

Simultaneous submissions will be considered with the usual proviso of informing the magazine if they become accepted elsewhere.

Payment rates are \$100 for original flash fiction and \$200 for original short fiction for first serial and publication rights for the first three months. Reprints of short and flash fiction will be considered but there is no payment for these.

Submit your work through the website and include a brief author bio. You should gain a response within 12-16 weeks.

Website: www.craftliterary.com



Good pay for a gay play

Plays written in either English or Italian on 'gay themes and diversity in love' are invited for the Carlo Annoni Award which is dedicated to the promotion of LGBTQ topics. There is a prize of €1,000 for the winner in each language category and also a special prize for a play on the theme of asylum seekers who leave their country because they are victims of sexual orientation discrimination.

Only one play may be submitted per writer and there are no limitations on length or cast numbers. Entries will be assessed on creative content, play form, pertinence with the topic and the play's social impact. The winners will be announced at a public awards ceremony in Milan in September and through press and social media outlets.

The organisers would like to create a virtual library of plays received so they may be available to theatre companies. You should say clearly on your application whether you would like your play to be included in the virtual library or not.

Submit your work before the deadline of 30 April 2019 with your name, email address and a telephone number for any further communication.

Email to: info@premiocarloanonni.eu

Website: <http://premiocarloanonni.eu/?lang=en>



Franglais interdit

March sees the annual French book fair Salon du Livre in Paris. However, in February a section of the salon website called 'scène YA' affronted national pride in the French mother tongue, causing 100 leading French writers to protest the extensive use of the 'sub-English known as globish'. Such bestselling and award-winning authors as Muriel Barbery, Leïla Slimani, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Catherine Millet and Marie NDiaye wrote to *Le Monde* and *La République des Livres* decrying the use of such terms of 'photobooth', 'bookquizz', but most especially 'Young Adult'.

They observed, 'In the streets, on the web... everywhere, in fact, English tends to replace French, little by little, at the speed of a word a day... But even at a book fair in France? In Paris, in a space dedicated to the book and to literature, is it not possible to speak French? For us, intellectuals, writers, teachers, journalists and lovers of this language from all walks of life, "young adult" represents the straw that broke the camel's back. This use of 'young adult', because it is referring to French literature, because it is deliberately addressing young French people looking for readings, is too much. It has become an aggression, an insult, an unbearable act of cultural delinquency.'

The authors deplored instances where 'a single French word is replaced unnecessarily with an English word.' The protest appears to have worked, as the Salon du Livre website was quickly updated with most of the offending English words replaced by French.

Masterful Masterton

Graham Masterton has been announced as this year's Horror Writers Association Lifetime Achievement Award winner.

He will receive the award at StokerCon 2019, at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Masterton's best known horror novel is *The Manitou*, which was turned into a successful film

in 1978, and to which the author has written several sequels as well as over seventy other horror novels, both stand-alones and in series such as *Night Warriors*. Masterton is also a prolific author of historical novels, thrillers, short stories, and over two dozen sex manuals.



UK MAGAZINE MARKET

A fine body of work

Tina Jackson

Healthy For Men, edited by Tom Rowley, is a fitness and lifestyle magazine for men who want to improve their lives from the inside out.

'Most people want to improve their life; our readers have the tenacity to take action,' said Tom. '*Healthy For Men* helps readers increase their general wellbeing, and learn how to become stronger in both body and mind. Every page aims to tell our readers that they have to power to improve their physical and mental health, and offer them expert advice on how to master their bodies.'

Healthy For Men features content that helps readers become experts on nutrition, fitness, mental wellbeing, sexual health, and anything that can offer tools for a more fulfilling life.

'Our features include investigations into topical food trends, uncovering myths and important facts about diets,' said Tom. 'We meet athletes who have achieved superhuman heights and learn how they trained, both physically and mentally. But it's not about sensationalising these people; it's about extracting important lessons our readers can learn from those who have demonstrated an extraordinary life.'

Readers want to invest in their wellbeing to improve the quality of their lives. 'The *Healthy For Men* reader is looking for that tasty bit of knowledge to get the edge on their general wellbeing. They're likely to have a family, or be busy with work, but they want to live longer and be happier.'

Creating life-enhancing coverage is key for Tom. 'It's important that *Healthy For Men* is progressive and inspires positivity. We want to look at health in new ways, never obsessing about aesthetics over the things that matter most. Traditional journalism can be full of fear. Happiness is the most important thing for *Healthy For Men*.'

A good feature for *Healthy For Men* will include an element of surprise. 'It will take something emotive, challenging or taken for granted and turn it on its head,' said Tom. 'It will make our readers think differently about important topics, and feel better equipped to take on the world around them.'

Feature lengths range from 800 to 1,200 words. 'The tone can be light-hearted or more on the serious side, but it's important the content is expert and authoritative. We publish list features, long-form features, recipes and exercise drill features – but long-form is preferred from freelancers.'

Freelancers need to show they understand the *Healthy For Men* brand, and that their idea supports its mission. 'You should ask yourself, does the content inspire a better way of life?' said Tom. 'Why is it better suited to *Healthy For Men* than any other brand? Originality is important, but it could be a tried and tested idea with a slightly different angle on it. Top tips for better sleep, for example, could be top tips for sleeping with an attention-addict baby in the house. Another thing is photography: if a freelancer can supply engaging high resolution pics with the copy, we're onto a winner!'

Tom is happy to hear from prospective writers who understand and can reflect *Healthy for Men* and its readers.

'Email me a short bio with a list of your expertise,' said Tom. 'Add some personality, be friendly, be interested in the content we make. Create a pitch for something that you find emotive or that challenges you. If it's just because you've got the resources, it's probably something we can write in-house. Give your content a personal angle! I get hundreds of freelancer emails; the daring and persistent ones come out on top.'

Payment is around £290 for a 1,200 word feature.

Details: email: hfm@therivergroup.co.uk; website: www.healthyformen.com



In the loop

Keep your contacts fresh with a simple reminder, advises Patrick Forsyth

By the time this column appears it will be a while ago, but a thought struck me as I cleared Christmas cards away. A year or so ago I had some work done on my bathroom, creating a nice new shower. I was pleased with the whole enterprise: the quote, the way the work was done and the result, but, a year on, I would have been hard pressed to call the company name quickly to mind.

This not so surprising. We are all exposed to maybe 500 advertisements every day, more if you indulge in certain activities such as commuting or listening to commercial radio. It clearly varies, but must be many thousands each year. Messages vary, of course, with some memorable and others such rubbish they do not linger in the memory for a moment. But one factor is clear: we are more likely to remember those that repeat.

The man who installed my shower knew this and sent me a Christmas card.

That is about as simple as promotion can get but, for a while at least, I remember the name again. I might even be in a position to recommend them.

What has this to do with writing? You may think that an editor both knows you and has a good opinion of you, but if it is some months since they last published an article you submitted then realistically other things are likely to be at the forefront of their mind. Note the word realistically. Never underestimate the power of simple promotion. Even the simplest reminder can be a positive spur to memory and part of what gets you that next commission. Don't overestimate how important you are to people – keep in touch and make reminders memorable.

PEN winner

Mexican-American novelist Sandra Cisneros has won the \$50,000 PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature. She received the Award at a ceremony in New York on 26 February. The Award is given annually by PEN America and the Vladimir Nabokov Literary Foundation 'a living author whose body of work, either written in or translated into English, represents the highest level of achievement in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and/or drama, and is of enduring originality and consummate craftsmanship.' Cisneros's books include *The House on Mango Street*, a classic of modern Latina literature in the US, and *Caramelo*.

FLASHES

E&T magazine for the Institute of Engineering has Dickon Ross as its editor in chief. Ideas are welcomed from specialist professional writers and practising engineers. The features editor is Vitali Vitaliev. **Details:** email: features.editor@theiet.org; website: <https://eandt.theiet.org>

Cheryl Dennett is the publisher and editor of the *Local Eye* group of community magazines for Christchurch, Highcliffe, Barton on Sea and Southborne. **Details:** email: info@localeyemagazines.co.uk; website: www.localeyemagazines.co.uk

Scrabble, the board game beloved by wordsmiths that was invented by American architect Alfred Mosher Butts, celebrated its 70th anniversary in December. In its first revamp for four years, the *Scrabble Dictionary* got 300 new words last September, including 'ew', 'twerk' and 'qapik', which is a unit of currency in Azerbaijan.

Planet Earth is the free bi-annual magazine from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). It is edited by Carla Yorukoglu. **Details:** email: editors@nerc.ac.uk; website: <https://nerc.ukri.org/>

Kath Brown is the editorial director of *Woman & Home* magazine. **Details:** email: w&hmail@timeinc.com

'Good writers of prose must be part poet, always listening to what they write.' American writer William Zinsser

GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Lady Blue notes

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Lady Blue Publishing editors like to claim their work is 'Where elegance meets eloquence'. They publish literature and artwork from around the world, and nurture creators by offering feedback on all submissions, free digital access to their literary journal and 'spotlight features' for writers and artists.

They will consider individual pieces for the biannual literary arts journal, and novellas and chapbooks for standalone publication. For now they do not accept written pieces longer than 40,000 words.

'Thoughtful feedback' is offered in two ways, a free 300-500 word paragraph outlining strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for revision, or a 1-2 page editorial letter which goes into more detail, for an agreed fee.

Lady Blue Literary Arts Journal needs submissions of: no more than three poems; ten pages of fiction or nonfiction; ten photographs; audio and video files, no longer than eight minutes. For texts, submit doc, docx or txt files.

Response time is 'up to four weeks', but may be longer for novella submissions. Payment, royalties and rights are all discussed on acceptance.

Website: www.ladybluepublishing.com



Sentence by sentence

The Victorian Prize for Literature, Australia's most valuable literary award, has been won by Behrouz Boochani for *No Friend But The Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison*. The Prize is worth Aus\$100,000, and the author won a further \$25,000 for the Victorian Prize for Non-Fiction.

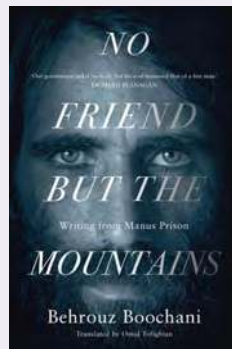
What makes Boochani's story so remarkable is that he is an Iranian Kurd journalist and filmmaker who since 2013 has been held prisoner in Australia's asylum system on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. It was from prison that he wrote the book on his phone, sending it to his translator, Omid Tofighian as a series of WhatsApp messages. The book tells the story of Boochani's journey from Indonesia to Australia and his incarceration.

He told the *Guardian Australia*, 'My main aim has always been for the people in Australia and around the world to understand deeply how this system has tortured innocent people on Manus and Nauru in a systematic way for almost six years. I hope this award will bring more attention to our situation, and create change, and end this barbaric policy.'

The author won out from a total shortlist of 28 authors. Mr Tofighian accepted the Prize on the author's behalf, saying 'This is one of the most vicious forms of neocolonial oppression that is taking over the world at the moment – and to address this book in this way and to recognise it and draw attention to the narrative it is presenting will have repercussions for many generations to come.'



In other categories, The Victorian Fiction Prize was won by Elise Valmorbidia for *The Madonna of the Mountains*. Kendall Feaver won the Drama Prize with *The Almighty Sometimes*. Kate Lilley won the poetry prize for Poetry with *Tilt*. The People's Choice Award went to Bri Lee for her autobiographical *Eggshell Skull*, while the prize for best unpublished manuscript was won by Victoria Hannan for *Kokomo*.



Make your voice heard

The Drum Literary Magazine publishes short fiction, essays, poetry, novel excerpts, and interviews in audio form. The editorial team are proud to be 'the best place for "Literature Out Loud"'. It needs 'stories that really do tell a story. And essays that engage in the complexity of an idea,' so surprise them with poems of voice, vision and music and prose of elegance and clarity.

Submit: 1-3 poems, in any form or style, in a single file, making sure that the poems 'thrive out loud'; fiction in any genre and essays, up 5,000 words.

New for *The Drum* is a section called Stories On The Street, for which contributors are asked to choose an excerpt from a book that is out of copyright, and ask people to read it into a voice-recording app, such as on a mobile phone. The idea is for everyday people to bring classic literature to life. They suggest 'matching the excerpt to the location, for example a food/dining scene in a restaurant'. Submit Stories On The Street by email: editor@drumlitmag.com

There is a \$3 fee to submit work online, or you can send a disposable manuscript, fee-free, by post: PO Box 380959, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Response time is 'slow'. Payment is a \$50 honorarium for audio rights. Website: www.drumlitmag.com

ONLINE SPECIFIC MARKET

A specific fix

Gary Dalkin

Daily Science Fiction is a US website founded in 2010 which, as it sounds, publishes a speculative fiction story every day, of up to 1,500 words. Readers can subscribe to the site and have each day's story delivered as an email.

Founders and editors in chief Michele-Lee Barasso and Jonathan Laden and their editorial team are always open (except for Christmas week) to consider any form of speculative fiction – science fiction, fantasy, slipstream, etc – between 100 and 1,500 words. They will consider a 'flash series' of three or more flash tales built around a common theme.

DSF will publish dark fantasy but not pure horror. Military SF is likely to be a tough sell, and while humour is welcome the editors find it works best in very short stories. Appropriate sensuality is fine, but no erotica. No previously published works, not even on your own website. No multiple or simultaneous submissions.

To get an idea of the sort of stories bought, read a selection of tales on the *DSF* website or subscribe to the email and get a free story everyday.

Payment is 8¢ per word for First World Rights and nonexclusive reprint rights. See the full guidelines for specifics and to submit: <https://dailysciencefiction.com>



Liberal residencies

Gladstone's Library is inviting submissions for its 2020 writing residencies.

Applications are invited from fiction and non-fiction writers of prose, poetry, screenplay and drama. Residencies, taking place in February, May, September and November, will be awarded to four writers whose work engages with liberal values.

Each accepted writer in residence will receive a month-long residency at Gladstone's Library, which is the UK's only prime ministerial library. During their residencies, the writers will blog about their residency, run a creative writing workshop and host an evening event. Writers in residence receive full board and lodging, travel expenses and a stipend of £100 a week.

To apply, writers should have published a book within the last three years. Writers at all stages of their career are invited to submit. Self-published writers and authors of academic texts are not eligible.

To apply, send a one-page CV or biography, a copy of the book you'd like the judges to consider, a 250-word statement on your take on 'redefining liberal values', a 250-word statement on the work you'd like to undertake at the library, a 250-word proposal for an evening event and day masterclass and the length and suggested date of your residency.

Submissions are accepted until 5 April.

Details: Writer in Residence, Gladstone's Library, Church Lane, Hawarden, Flintshire CH5 3DF; email: louise.yates@gladlib.org; website: www.gladstoneslibrary.org



Eclectic Writing wanted

Inklings Publishing is a US indie publishing novels and anthologies. It opens for novel submissions in April – see the website guidelines – but short stories are currently wanted for The Eclectic Writing Series, a series of themed anthologies for a general audience, specifically *Eclectically Scientific*, for poems (5-10) and stories or non-fiction (up to three, 4,000-7,000 words each) which explore science in the broadest possible sense.

Follow the web guidelines and submit a doc or docx file by email: submissions@inklingspublishing.com

Include a short bio on the last page. Deadline is 31 March. Response time is 'reasonable.' Payment is \$25 plus a copy for the usual rights.

Website: www.inklingspublishing.com

And another thing...



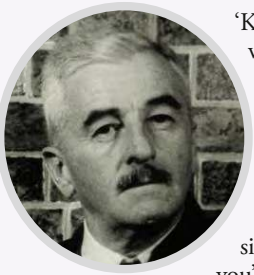
'I aim to make the fiction flexible so that it bends itself around the facts as we have them. Otherwise I don't see the point. Nobody seems to understand that. Nobody seems to share my approach to historical fiction. I suppose if I have a maxim, it is that there isn't any necessary conflict between good history and good drama. I know that history is not shapely, and I know the truth is often inconvenient and incoherent.'

Hilary Mantel

'The mind has plenty of ways of preventing you from writing, and paralysing self-consciousness is a good one. The only thing to do is ignore it, and remember what Vincent van Gogh said in one of his letters about the painter's fear of the blank canvas – "The canvas," he said, "is far more afraid of the painter."'



Philip Pullman



'Keep it amateur. You're not writing for money but for pleasure. It should be fun. And it should be exciting. Maybe not as you write, but after it's done you should feel an excitement, a passion. That doesn't mean feeling proud, sitting there gloating over what you've done. It means you know you've done your best. Next time it's going to be better.'

William Faulkner

'...Writers are defined not by the stories they tell, or their politics, or their gender, or their race, but by the words they use. Writing begins with language, and it is in that initial choosing, as one sifts through the wayward lushness of our wonderful mongrel English, that choice of vocabulary and grammar and tone, the selection on the palette, that determines who's sitting at that desk.'



Donald E Westlake

FLASHES

Saga magazine now pays £50 for the star letter (max 100 words).
Email: editor@saga.co.uk; website: www.saga.co.uk

Private Eye opened entries for this year's £5,000 Paul Foot Award for investigative and campaigning journalism, accepting work published in a newspaper, magazine or online publication until Tuesday 2 April.

Margaret Atwood is writing a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, due out in September.

Newsquest launched the *Harlow Guardian* following Reach plc's closure of *Harlow Star*.

Buzzfeed UK editor-in-chief Janine Gibson left the news website after more than three years in the job.

The £30,000 Women's Prize for Fiction is now officially a charity called the Women's Prize Trust.

Lucy Dauman has been promoted to senior commissioning editor at Sphere fiction

Hachette UK will sponsor Independent Bookshop Week (IBW), 15-22 June,

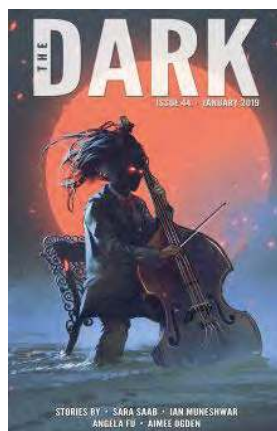
The Sun 'launched a new sports journalism scholarship in memory of Vikki Orvice, who became the first female football writer on a UK tabloid newspaper, following her death aged 56', reported *Press Gazette*.

'I think Shakespeare was the determining influence of my desire to write. I think of him every day.' Margaret Drabble

GLOBAL HORROR MARKET

Dare to go dark

Jenny Roche



A monthly online magazine of horror and dark fantasy The Dark invites fiction of 2,000-6,000 words.

'Don't be afraid to experiment or to deviate from the ordinary. Be different, try us with fiction that may fall out of "regular" categories,' say guidelines. Just avoid graphic or violent horror.

Follow the guidelines and submit a doc or rtf file by email: thedarkmagazine@gmail.com

No simultaneous or multiple submissions; reprints will be considered if they have been previously published in the last two years in established print markets including short story collections and anthologies.

Payment is 6¢ per word for original fiction for first world rights and 1¢ per word for reprints for non-exclusive reprint rights.

Response times are quick, sometimes under 24 hours, but may be longer depending on the volume of submissions.

Website: <http://thedarkmagazine.com>

Children's play

The Children and Young Persons Playwriting Award 2019 aims to discover young writing talents up to the age of eighteen, living or attending full time education in Essex.

Winners will see their work recognised and performed by Mad Apple Collective this June.

There are four categories with a 'Best Play' award in each and a Best Overall Play trophy award for a favourite amongst all the winners.

Under-10s: theme, The Night of Adventures; max 15 sides of A4, up to four characters; best play, £20.

Ages 11-12: theme, The Journey; max 20 sides, four characters; best play, £20.

Ages 13-15: theme, The Discovery; max 23 sides, four characters; best play, £30.

Ages 16-18: theme, Tech is Your Friend; 20-25 sides, 3-4 characters; best play, £30.

Entrants must live or be in full-time education in one of the postcode areas CM, CO, CB, RM, SS or IG.

Judges will be looking for quality and originality of the idea, the characters and dialogue and, less importantly, the script layout and approach. Format and guidance notes are on the website. Submit a doc or pdf document by 7 April, by email: madapplecollective@gmail.com

Website: <https://madapplecollective.com>

New comp for Newcastle

The Newcastle Poetry Competition is a brand new contest from Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts.

There is a first prize of £1,000 and a week-long residency at the Contemporary Poetry Archives at Newcastle University during the Newcastle Poetry Festival between 1 and 4 May. There is a second prize of £500, a third prize of £250 and five highly commended prizes of £25. The competition will be judged by Deryn Rees-Jones.

The competition is for original, unpublished poems up to forty lines by poets from anywhere in the world.

All poems must have a title. Type poems on single sheets of A4 in at least 12pt font. The poet's name must not appear on the manuscript. Enter poems by post or online as doc, docx or pdf files. Postal entrants, include your name, email and postal address and telephone number on a separate sheet.

The entry fee is £6 for the first poem in a submission and £4 for any subsequent poems in the same submission.

The closing date is 26 March.

Details: Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, Percy Building, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU; website: www.ncl.ac.uk



ARTHUR UNEARTHED

Michael Richardson, a special collections librarian at the University of Bristol has made a remarkable discovery. Inside several books which were printed in Strasbourg between 1494 and 1502 he found seven hand-written fragments of manuscript dating from the Middle Ages. Examining the parchments, Richardson recognised several names from the Arthurian legends.

He consulted Dr Leah Tether of the International Arthurian Society and it became clear he had made a major discovery. The material reveals 'subtle but significant' differences with currently known versions of the Arthurian stories. The focus is on Merlin the Magician and the new pieces contain more detailed descriptions than previous accounts. Dr Tether said 'These fragments of the story of Merlin are a wonderfully exciting find, which may have implications for the study not just of this text but also of other related and later texts that have shaped our modern understanding of the Arthurian legend.'

Investigations are ongoing, and Dr Tether noted, 'Time and research will reveal what further secrets about the legends of Arthur, Merlin and the Holy Grail these fragments might hold.'

For full details of the find, and textual differences, see the website: <https://writ.rs/merlin>



INTRODUCTIONS

Writing Magazine presents a selection of music magazines currently accepting contributions. We strongly recommend that you read back issues, familiarise yourself with their guidelines before submitting and check websites for submission details.



Classic Pop magazine, edited by Steve Harnell, celebrates retro pop music and artists. The main focus is predominantly 1980s and 90s chart-friendly and electronic music but *Classic Pop*

also covers modern artists who reference retro styles in their music. Features include in-depth interviews with top artists and bands, career overviews, and behind-the-scenes articles on classic albums. Steve is happy to accept freelance submissions from outside contributors, preferably via email as a first point of contact. Payment varies.

Details: email: steve.harnell@anthem-publishing.com; website: www.classicpopmag.com



Shindig! magazine has Jon 'Mojo' Mills as its editor-in-chief and is aimed at a passionate readership interested in exploring lesser-known stories and personalities from

the worlds of garage, punk, rock, folk, prog and psychedelia, past and present. *Shindig!* covers music, film and the counterculture with insider knowledge, love and respect, via interviews, retrospectives, in-depth features, news and reviews, all offering insider knowledge and insight into music and film history. Contact Jon with ideas.

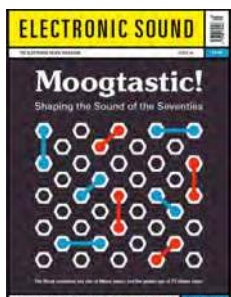
Details: email: jon@shindig-magazine.com; website: www.shindig-magazine.com



Songlines, edited by Jo Frost, covers folk and roots music from all over the world, and explores cultures and their politics, history, ethnicity and environment through their music, whether traditional or

contemporary. Features include artist interviews, scene guides, travel stories and frontline reports. Jo accepts freelance submissions, as long as they're relevant to *Songlines'* musical remit of world/folk/roots music. Send ideas by email. Payment varies.

Email: jo@songlines.co.uk; **website:** www.songlines.co.uk



Electronic Sound magazine, edited by Push, with Neil Mason as commissioning editor, is a specialist magazine for lovers of electronic music and culture. Reads are fanatical electronic music heads with in-depth

knowledge of their subject, and *Electronic Sound's* mission is to add to their information pool. Pitches for freelance features that combine sparkling writing, wit and in-depth knowledge of the subject are welcomed (not finished articles). Payment varies.

Details: email: info@electronicsound.co.uk; website: <https://electronicsound.co.uk>



Vive Le Rock, edited by Eugene Butcher, is a proudly indie music magazine covering punk, garage, glam, rock'n'roll and new wave music, with a lively mixture of features,

interviews, career retrospectives and reviews. Authenticity and attitude are key for *Vive Le Rock* and its readership of loyal, life-long music fans who are very much involved in the live music scene. Send ideas by email.

Details: email: info@vivelorock.net; website: <https://vivelorock.net/>



Echoes, edited by Chris Wells, is a monthly black music magazine covering soul, funk, reggae, jazz, hip hop and R&B/pop. The magazine takes pride in the insight, wit and intelligence of its coverage, which

includes artist interviews, career and genre retrospectives and cultural insights. Chris has regular columnists and freelancers but there are occasional opportunities for freelancers and anyone wanting to write for *Echoes* needs to approach him by email with a summary of their idea. Payment varies.

Details: email: editor@echoesmagazine.co.uk; website: <https://echoesmagazine.co.uk/>

GLOBAL SPECIFIC MARKET

Rewriting history

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Martinus Publishing is a US small press specialising in science fiction and fantasy, and 'uncanny stories in-between'.

Currently closed to novel submissions, Martinus are putting together an anthology and want short stories, 1,500-10,000 words, for it. Called *This Never Happened!*, it is an anthology of alternate [sic] history farce and fantasy. The team want writers to think about the 'what ifs' of history. 'What if Rome had never fallen? What if the USA lost the Revolution? What if Hitler had never come to power?'



that kind of idea. The team want stories which are fun, devoted to the humorous side of alternative history fiction. Stories should be 'funny and outrageous'.

Keep the tone family friendly; no multiple or simultaneous subs, and reprints are only accepted if they are exceptional and have not been available to readers for at least one year. Submit a doc, rtf or docx file by email: mtiediting@inbox.com

Deadline is 30 April. Response time is 'six to twelve weeks'. Payment is '2% of the net profits from the anthology for the first year of publication, paid via PayPal for First Print & Electronic Publishing rights'.

Website: www.martinus.us



FLASHES

Alessandra Renna is the new fiction editor at *Women's World Magazine* in the USA.

Details: email: fiction@womansworldmag.com; **website:** www.womansworld.com

On the Come Up, the new novel by Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*, is to be turned into a feature film directed by George Tillman Jr, who also directed last year's big screen adaptation of Angie's bestselling debut.

Harper Collins pledged £20,000 in grants for independent bookshops as part of its ongoing commitment to The Literacy Project, reported *The Bookseller*.

BookTrust announced its latest Writer-Illustrator in Residence is Nicola Davies, 'whose focus is on urging children to explore the natural world around them'. She is well known for *The Day the War Came* and *Lots*, among many other picture books.

Louise Robinson, formerly in charge of the *Sunday Express* magazine, has been appointed editor of over-fifties magazine *Saga*, which is due for a relaunch.

Romance writer Rosamunde Pilcher, the author of multi-million selling saga *The Shell Seekers*, died in February aged 94.

'What I am trying to achieve is a voice sitting by a fireplace telling you a story on a winter's evening.'
Truman Capote

GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Bone machine

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Bone & Ink Press is a new small press based in south eastern Wisconsin. Editor in chief Jessie Lynn McMains states that the team are committed 'to publishing the works of marginalised writers... writing that startles like a shout in the street'. They aim to publish a combination of anthologies, books and chapbooks by individual authors, each year.

It needs submissions of 'your strangest prayers... your loudest shouts... words that make us jittery like five shots of espresso... prose that's like an incantation and



poetry that's like a magic spell'. The press accepts poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, prose-poetry, music reviews and art criticism, stories that blend fact and fiction, and they want 'all your delicious hybrid works'.

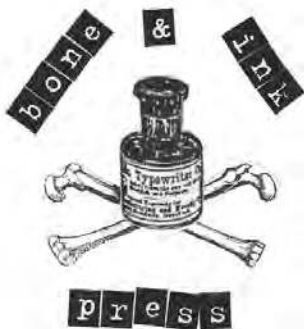
Submit an unpublished manuscript, anywhere between ten and sixty pages, as a doc or docx by email: editor@boneandinkpress.com

Expect help with editing and rewriting. Accepted manuscripts will receive proofreading and editorial suggestions. All work is promoted vigorously.

Bone & Ink Literary Magazine publishes three issues a year, plus an occasional themed issue, and needs submissions in a similar vein to the press: 1-6 poems or shorter prose pieces, or one longer piece of prose, up to 5,000 words.

Response time for books is 'within four to five months' and for the journal is 'within two to three months'. Payment for books 'will depend on how many copies we sell, but you will get paid'. There is token or no payment for the journal.

Website: www.boneandinkpress.com



Play to win

The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting, which is the UK's biggest play-script writing prize, is open for entries.

The competition is for original, unpublished, unperformed and unproduced play scripts for stage performances at least an hour long. There is a first prize of £16,000, a Judges' Award of £8,000, an Original New Voice Award of £8,000 and an International Award of £8,000. All winning scripts are automatically under option to the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester for 24 months.

Original New Voice Awards are for playwrights who have not had a full-length play produced for twelve performances or more in a professional venue. International Awards are for international playwrights submitting through The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting's international partners: The BANFF Centre in Canada, Belvoir Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company in Australia and Berkeley Rep and Playwrights Horizons in the USA.

Scripts must be submitted anonymously. Entry is free. Only one script is accepted per entrant. Submit the completed play in a single doc, docx or pdf file through the online submission system. All plays must have a title and the writer must have a pseudonym.

The closing date is 5 June.

Website: www.writeaplay.co.uk



Bath time again!

The seventh international Bath Short Story Award is inviting entries.

The prizes are £1,200 for the winner, £300 for the runner up and £100 for the third. There is a £100 Acorn Award for the best story by an unpublished writer and a £50 local prize. This year's judge is Samuel Hodder from Blake Friedmann Literary Agency.

The competition is for original, unpublished short stories up to 2,200 words aimed at adult readers. Type entries in 1.5 or double spacing, in 12pt font on numbered pages. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Use the story title as the filename. Submit doc, docx, odt, txt or pdf files via email, or enter by post. Postal entrants, include a separate sheet with full contact details.

The entry fee is £8 per story, payable by PayPal or cheques made out to Bath Short Story Award.

The closing date is 15 April

Details: 20 Penn Lea Road, Bath BA1 3RA; **email:** entry@bathshortstoryaward.org; **website:** www.bathshortstoryaward.org

GLOBAL CRIME MARKET

Serial killer, qu'est ce que c'est?

Tina Jackson

Well-known genre anthology editor Mitzi Szereto is inviting submissions of new true-crime stories about serial killers for an anthology she is editing for an American publisher.

Mitzi is looking for submissions of stories between 4,000 and 7,500 words. 'I'd especially like to see stories featuring serial killers from locations outside of the United States,' said Mitzi. 'If you prefer to write about a serial killer who's extremely well known to American audiences, offer a new angle on the story.'

Material must be factual and fact-checked. 'I'm looking for well-developed content that offers the reader more than dry reportage.'

Stories should be formatted as double-spaced Arial 12pt doc files, sent as email attachments. Indent the first line of each paragraph by half an inch. Do not add extra lines between paragraphs or irregular spacing between words or sentences. Use American spelling and punctuation. Include your legal name, postal address, and an author bio of 50-100 words written in the third person. The email subject line should be 'Serial Killers anthology'.

Accepted authors will receive a one-time payment of \$130 per story, and two print copies of the book.

Deadline for submissions is 1 May.

Details: email: Submissions4Mitzi@gmail.com; website: mitziszzereto.com

Feel it for Frome

The Frome Festival Short Story Competition, now in its fifteenth year, is inviting entries.

There is a first prize of £400, a second prize of £200, a third prize of £100 and additional prizes for local writers.

The competition is for original, unpublished short stories in any genre, between 1,000 and 2,200 words. Type stories in double spacing on single sides of A4. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Enter online or by post. Postal entrants should include a separate cover sheet with full contact details, story title and word count.

The entry fee is £8 per story, payable to Frome Festival Short Story Competition.

The closing date is 31 May.

Details: Frome Library, Justice Lane, Frome, Somerset BA11 1BE; www.fromeshortstorycompetition.co.uk

A wealth of Welsh Poetry

Now in its 13th year, the International Welsh Poetry Competition 2019 is inviting entries. First prize is £500, the second prize £250 and the third prize, £100. The winners and seventeen runners-up will be published online and in a future anthology. This year's judge will be Mike Jenkins.

The competition is for original, unpublished poems up to fifty lines, in any style and on any subject. Type poems clearly on single sides of A4. Your name must not appear on the manuscript. A completed entry form must accompany each entry. Enter by post or email.

The postal entry fee is £5 per poem, payable by cheques made out to The Welsh Poetry Competition. Online/email entry is £6 per poem, payable by PayPal.

The closing date is 26 May.

Details: The International Welsh Poetry Competition, 9 The Avenue, Pontypridd CF37 4DF; email: info@welshpoetry.co.uk; website: www.welshpoetry.co.uk

SF fantasy online

The Centropic Oracle is a Canadian audio publisher of SF and fantasy.

Publishing one story each week, it needs specific at PG level: no erotica, graphic violence; profanity, zombies, preaching, or racist, homophobic, misogynistic, or misandrist works.

Submit flash, 200-1,500 words, or short stories, 1,500-6,500. A published episode is around 40 minutes so stories around 3,500 words are a safe submission.

No multiple submissions, simultaneous submissions, or reprints. Follow the guidelines then submit an rtf file through the website: www.centropicoracle.com

Payment is Can1¢ per word for 'a one year exclusive and five years' non-exclusive audio rights from the date of publication.'



Novel Ideas

Stick?
Carrot? Cake!

Lynne Hackles is all about rewarding writing

'When this is finished I'll have a cup of tea,' I tell myself. It's not every day that I need to bribe my writing self but on bad days it helps. Another hundred words to lose and this story will be ready to go out. That deserves a chocolate biscuit with a cuppa. The rewards need to match the effort.

Author Catherine Green, aka SpookyMrsGreen: the Pagan Housewife agrees with me. 'My usual reward is a nice bar of chocolate or a cake, washed down with a glass of wine,' she says. 'I tell myself once this is done, I can open that bottle...'

Cake works for Julie Phillips too. 'Once I've reached, say, a thousand word target, I will treat myself to either some coffee or cake in a favourite café or simply take time off for a walk. If it's a longer project I'll buy a book I've been wanting to read or go to see a film. I think it's very important to treat ourselves well as writers and to keep ourselves going with little rewards. Very motivating.'

And more cake. Catherine, a university student I know, had an assignment to do for her course. She made a cake which took an hour to bake. That gave her an hour to write and she got a slice afterwards as her reward. This seems like a very good idea for anyone who likes baking and writing.

Writing a book? A meal and a good bottle of wine will cheer you as you reach your half-way mark. Reached the end? This is the time for the Biggie – a holiday, party or special meal out.

Plan what your reward is going to be. Think about it often and it will help you get to the final page of your work. Then you get cake.

FLASHES

Robin Jones edits *Heritage Railway* magazine and accepts well-written contributions.

Details: email: RJones@mortons.co.uk; **website:** www.heritage-railway.co.uk

Rotherham Council has rejected local newspaper *The Rotherham Advertiser's* bid to name a town square 'Chuckle Square' in honour of Barry and Paul Eliot, known in the comedy world as The Chuckle Brothers.

Andrea Levy, the bestselling author of *Small World* and *The Long Song*, died in February aged 62. Poet Benjamin Zephaniah said: 'In future if anyone wants to have a look at how the Windrush generation arrived here and how we the sons and daughters of the Windrush generation survived and are surviving, they have to refer to Andrea's work.'

Celebrating the publication of Margaret Busby's *The New Daughters of Africa* anthology, the Margaret Busby New Daughters of Africa Award, worth £20,000 will offer a black female student resident in Africa the opportunity to study at SOAS. The anthology will be published by Myriad in March.

'You need the devotion to your work that a priest of God has for his.'
Ernest Hemingway

GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

Flash fit

Jenny Roche

Flash fiction of all genres, especially 'anything that just doesn't quite fit anywhere else' is wanted for *Flash Fiction Online*. Published stories can be read on the website and there are also helpful links on defining and writing flash fiction and telling a great story in addition to flash fiction resources.

Submissions should be 500-1,000 words long and in addition to the main writer's guidelines on the website there are brief additional guidelines on submitting fantasy and slipstream, science fiction, horror, mainstream, literary, humour and seasonal stories. Reprints will be considered but not simultaneous submissions.



Payment is \$60 for original previously unpublished fiction for first electronic rights and a non-exclusive one time



right to publish in an anthology. Reprints earn 2¢ per word for non-exclusive rights.

Submit up to three stories through the website: <http://flashfictiononline.com>

SHARPEN THAT BLUE PENCIL

Entries are invited for the Blue Pencil Agency First Novel Award 2019.

The competition for unpublished and unagented authors is for a novel in any adult fiction genre. The winner will receive £1,000 and an introduction to literary agent Nelle Andrew of PFD, and the runner up gets £250 and a manuscript review.

To enter, send the first 5,000

words of a completed or nearly completed unpublished novel plus a 300-word synopsis and a covering letter with information about yourself and your career as a writer as well as the novel title and its genre. Send the manuscript as a doc, docx or pdf file, double spaced in 12pt font on numbered pages. Your name should not appear

on the manuscript, but the novel title must be on each page. The filename should be the title of the novel. Submit through the online submission system

There is an entry fee of £20 per novel, payable by PayPal.

The closing date is 31 May.

Website: <http://bluepencilagency.com/>

CALL FOR IGOR

tdotspec is a lively Canadian company 'dedicated to publishing awesome speculative fiction that reflects diverse and vibrant voices from around the world'. It is currently closed for novel submissions but needs short stories for an anthology, *Imps & Minions*. See the website for full details, and for other planned anthologies needing work.

Imps & Minions needs stories, up to 10,000 words (preferably 2,000-5,000), fresh and fun speculative fiction which involves an imp or a minion, even a henchman, the kind of characters usually featured in support, dragged to centre stage.

Stories may be humorous or serious, but must be character-driven, with a page-turning plot, 'a strong



hook, gripping narrative momentum, and a satisfying or resounding resolution'.

Submit odt, rtf, doc or docx files through the website: <http://tdotspec.com>

Simultaneous submissions, multiple subs and reprints are accepted. Deadline is 31 March. Payment is Can5¢ a word, max \$25, for non-exclusive First Rights.

Spice up your poems for this prize

Cinnamon Press is inviting entries for its Poetry Pamphlet Prize.

Two winners will each receive a publishing contract for their pamphlet and thirty copies. The competition judge is Ian Gregson.

To enter, send a collection of

15-25 poems, each no longer than fifty lines. The prize is open to all poets, published or not. Individual poems may have been previously published as long as the poet retains copyright.

Submit the collection through the

online submission system as doc, docx or rtf files. The author's name must not appear on the manuscript.

The entry fee is £10 per collection, payable via PayPal or bank transfer. The closing date is 31 March.

www.cinnamonpress.com



INTERNATIONAL ZINE SCENE

by PDR
Lindsay-Salmon



Kaleidotrope is a US zine which 'tends heavily towards the speculative', ie science fiction, fantasy and horror, but the editors like an eclectic mix and will always consider interesting work outside those categories.

It needs 'interesting and unconventional work... strange visions of distant shores, of imaginary countries and ordinary people'.

Submissions are open until 31 March, for fiction, under 10,000 words, flash, over 250 words, poetry, in any forms except 'sing-song' structures, and essays, memoirs and thoughtful criticism.

Submit work by email: kaleidotrope@gmail.com

Response time is 'typically 1-3 months'. Payment is 1¢ per word for prose, \$5 for poetry, for first serial rights for three months. Website: www.kaleidotrope.net



Mary: A Journal of New Writing is a student-run online arts journal sponsored by Saint Mary's College of California's MFA in Creative Writing programme. The annual zine publishes 'contemporary poetry and prose from a diverse group of talented emerging writers and established artists'. Read online before submitting fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and hybrid genres, up to five pages of poetry, fifteen pages of prose. Response time is 'slow'. Payment is \$30 for 'the usual rights'. Website: <http://maryjournal.org>



Light and Dark, new last year, currently features short fiction, but editor Kevin Marchand hopes to add poetry and non-fiction.

Submit literary 'short stories that dare to explore both light and dark; the beauty

and the pain of life; the two truths of existence,' no longer than 3,000 words.

Response time is 'within a month'. Payment is \$15 for first time publishing rights.

Website: <https://lightanddarkmagazine.com>



The Sunlight Press is a digital literary journal for new and established voices. The editorial team 'want to hear the ways people turn toward light and hope, whether it is through the arts, culture, spirituality, or humour', and also how they respond to the darkness and navigate unknown spaces.

Work is published twice a week: creative nonfiction, including essays, book reviews, and artists on craft pieces on Mondays, poetry and fiction on Wednesdays. Submit: personal essays, 650-1,000 words; flash, under 1,000 words; short stories, under 2,000 words; poems, no more than five; and reviews of books, short story collections, essay collections, art, television, movies, 750-1,000 words.

Submit doc or docx files by email: thesunlightpress@gmail.com

Response time is 'six to eight weeks'. Website: www.thesunlightpress.com



The Wolfpack is a new zine published by 'a pack of women writers who want to foster a community of support and imagination across all genres'. They aim 'to give a platform to

every voice, established and emerging', and think genre fiction and stories for younger readers deserve a place in literary magazines. An upcoming Summer Solstice issue will feature writers ages 13-20.

The wolf pack like 'the wild, weird, wonderful, and witty'. All genres are welcome but no novel excerpts, essays, reviews, or interviews.

Simultaneous submissions are allowed, reprints and multiple subs are not. Submit one short story, no more than 6,000 words, or three flash fiction pieces, in separate documents. For poetry submit a maximum of three poems in separate documents. Creative non-fiction, up to 5,000 words, should be

memoir and personal essays.

Email all submissions in docx format, to: wppmag@gmail.com

Response time is 'within ninety days'.

Payment is \$15 per piece.

Website: <https://wolfpackpress.org>



Selene Quarterly Magazine is a 'speculative romance, mystery, and alternate [sic] history quarterly periodical', publishing 'fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and art that dwells

in the shadows'. The editors love work which pushes the boundaries of genre and form. Apart from the usual romance and mystery genres the team would like to see more of 'wuxia, kaiju, supernatural mystery, paranormal romance, action horror, sci-fi action, superheroes, gothic romance, weird westerns, and other lesser known sub-genres'. Check out the guidelines for details of special submissions.

Submit: comics, 5-25 pages; poetry, no more than 100 lines; drabbles of 100 words exactly; flash fiction, 101-1,000 words; short stories, 1,001-1,500 words; and serial stories, 3,000-7,500 words. Simultaneous submissions are accepted, reprints and multiple subs are not.

Response time is 'five to eight weeks'. Payment is 1-3¢ a word for first world electronic and print rights in English with exclusivity for six months.

Submit through the website: <https://selenequarterly.com>



The Molotov Cocktail is an explosive flash fiction zine with an editorial team seeking volatile flash fiction. Literary fiction is certainly welcomed, but

the team want 'action, rotten characters, and viscera'. Genres are welcomed, as are 'surrealist and experimental stuff', but avoid romance, children's or YA and sword and sorcery fantasy.

Submit work under 1,000 words, preferably 300-600 words.

Website: <https://themolotovcocktail.com>

FLASHES

Dorset Business Focus is the new monthly business magazine from Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Contact editor Steve Bulley with ideas.

Details: steve.bulley@dccl.co.uk; **website:** www.dorsetchamber.co.uk

Books by Northern writers have been chosen for New Writing North's Read Regional 2019 scheme: **Children's:** *The Exact Opposite of Okay*, Laura Steven; *The Impossible: On the Run*, Mark Illis; **Fiction:** *Slip of a Fish*, Amy Arnold; *His Dark Sun*, Jude Brown; *Devil's Day*, Andrew Michael Hurley; *You Me Everything*, Catherine Isaac; *Kintu*, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi; *What Falls Between the Cracks*, Robert Scragg; *Nutcase*, Tony Williams; *Nature: The Blackbird Diaries*, Karen Lloyd; **Poetry:** *Flood*, Clare Shaw; *The Black Cab*, John Challis.

The Ljubljana International Literary Residency is inviting applications from writers who live or have lived in Ljubljana or any other UNESCO City of Literature. Each selected writer will be awarded a grant/travel expenses of \$1,000 and will stay in the Svicarija/Swiss House in the MGLC – International Centre of Graphic Arts. The closing date to apply is 31 March. **Website:** <https://writ.rs/LILR>

'Poetry is not the most important thing in life... I'd much rather lie in a hot bath reading Agatha Christie and sucking sweets.'

Dylan Thomas

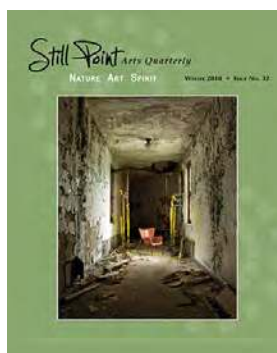
GLOBAL CREATIVITY MARKET

In a positive spirit

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Shanti Arts Publishing is run by an editorial team 'devoted to producing beautiful and compelling books related to art, nature, and spirit'. They publish 'trade books, art books, photography books, artist monographs, exhibition catalogues, gift books, and children's picture books; non-fiction and fiction'. Their books are both in print and digital and they take pride in a close relationship with their authors and artists.

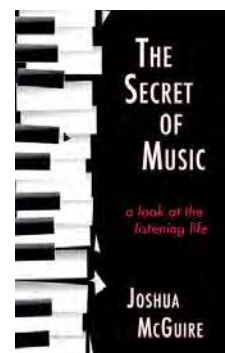
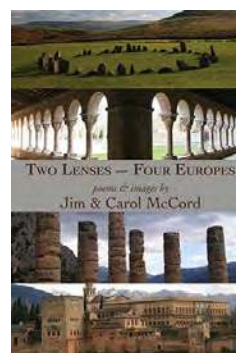
Books submissions are open. Submit a package query including a complete but brief description of the project, with an outline of the book contents or an annotated table of contents, names of authors/editors/artists involved and a 'description of how the authors/editors/artists would help market and sell the book', plus two or three sample images of any artwork/illustrations



with a description of 'the kind of art you think would work well'.

Shanti also publish *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, an art and literary journal. Sign up for a free digital sub and to read back issues. It favours 'historical and contemporary art, fiction, non-fiction, and poetry'.

For the *Quarterly*, submit 'fiction, creative non-fiction, essays, poetry' with a word limit of 5,000 words,



on the theme 'The Dance', by 1 June. Writers are asked to consider Isadora Duncan's words: 'I would like to no longer dance to anything but the rhythm of my soul.'

Response time for novels is 'within three months,' and for the magazine is 'reasonable'. Payment is discussed on acceptance for exclusive first rights.

Website: www.shantiarts.co

Put your poems in the Binsted

Entries are invited for The Binsted Prize from Binsted Arts and the South Downs Poetry Festival.

The competition has a first prize of £250, a second prize of £150 and a third prize of £50. Winner will be invited to read their poems at an event during the Binsted Poetry Festival on 7 June. The judge is poet James Simpson.

The competition is for original, unpublished poems up to fifty lines. Type poems in 12pt Times New Roman with single spacing. Your name must not appear on the manuscript. Send two copies of each poem and a completed entry form. Enter by post.

The entry fee is £5 for the first poem and £4 for any subsequent poems, payable by cheques made out to Binsted Arts.

The closing date is 29 March.

Details: The Competition Secretary, Shirley Park, Yaptan Lane, Walberton, Arundel BN18 0AN; **website:** www.binsted.org/poetry-comp-19

Wellcome winners

The longlist for the 10th anniversary Wellcome Prize is: *Amateur: A true story about what makes a man*, Thomas Page McBee; *Astroturf*, Matthew Sperling; *Educated*, Tara Westover; *Freshwater*, Akwaeke Emezi; *Heart: A history*, Sandeep Jauhar; *Mind on Fire: A memoir of madness and recovery*, Arnold Thomas Fanning; *Murmur*, Will Eaves; *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Ottessa Moshfegh; *Polio: The odyssey of eradication*, Thomas Abraham; *Sight*, Jessie Greengrass; *The Trauma Cleaner: One woman's extraordinary life in death, decay and disaster*, Sarah Krasnostein; *This Really Isn't About You*, Jean Hannah Edelstein.

The shortlist for the £30,000 prize will be announced on 19 March, with the winner revealed at an evening ceremony on Wednesday 1 May at Wellcome Collection.



Monkey around

A free current affairs and arts magazine produced by writers in the UK, Ireland, Italy and Spain, *Three Monkeys Online* calls itself 'a curious, alternative magazine'. It was founded in 2004 by a small group of writers who wanted to bring in-depth interviews, debates, intelligent opinion pieces and reviews to internet publishing. They are always looking for good writing and different viewpoints from new and talented writers with something to say about politics, music, literature/books, history, food and travel.

Original fiction and poetry are a new addition to the magazine and all genres and formats are welcome.

The magazine is not able to pay writers but does share some advertising revenue and offers ad space to returning contributors. There is also the possibility of ebook publication with Three Monkeys Online Books with authors gaining a big share of the profits.

Submit articles to: submissions@threemonkeysonline.com; **submit fiction and poetry to:** fiction.poetry@threemonkeysonline.com

Website: www.threemonkeysonline.com

GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

A new chapter for Story

Jenny Roche

Relaunched in February, *Story Magazine* is a triannual literary print magazine which champions writers and publishes engaging fiction and non-fiction. Editor-in-chief Michael Nye wants the magazine to be diverse and inclusive by publishing a range of voices.

'Along with great storytelling we want work in our magazine to be empathic, entertaining and emotionally complex,' he says. '*Story* wants to publish work that takes risks, confuses genres and style and reimagines narrative.'

Though based in Ohio, *Story* has a firm emphasis on the magazine being part of a literary community that is both national and global. There are also big plans for the future of the magazine with one themed issue each year and to include poetry, have a reading series, a podcast, conferences, community workshops and to develop partnerships with arts and literary organisations.

If you would like your work to be in at the beginnings of these plans check the website for a future theme yet to be announced and submit previously unpublished fiction or non-fiction that is double spaced using the website submissions manager. For fiction there are no restrictions on style, content or length and anything from flash fiction to novellas will be considered. The response time is 6-8 weeks and payment on publication will be \$10 per page.

Website: www.storymagazine.org



Words on a page

Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre is inviting entries for The Page is Printed, a creative writing competition for writing that fits on a single page of A4.

Enter prose, poetry, scripts, letters, lists – bearing in mind that the judges are particularly looking for work that takes a bold, original approach and reads well aloud. There is an open prize of £100, a Somerset prize of £100, three under-18s prizes of £25 and a best of the night prize of £25, which will be awarded at the evening event on 27 April.

Enter by email, sending a completed entry form, which can be downloaded from the website, with your A4-sized entry.

The entry fee is £5 for one entry and £10 for up to three. Include the payment reference on the entry form. Entry fees include a ticket to the event on 27 April.

The closing date is 31 March.

Details: email: thepageisprinted@gmail.com; website: www.tacchi-morris.com

Noir SF competition

The 23rd Annual Parsec SF/Fantasy/Horror Short Story Contest is currently open to submissions on this year's theme, which is Noir. The theme must be integral to your story, but can be interpreted how you wish. The Contest is open to non-professionally published writers, which is defined as writers who have sold less than three stories to a large scale publication.

All submissions must fall within the science fiction, fantasy or horror genres and be no longer than 3,500 words. There is no entry fee. Stories must be original and previously unpublished. Use standard manuscript format and submit as a doc, docx or rtf.

The winning author will receive \$200 and publication in the 2019 Confluence convention programme book. The runners-up will receive \$100 and \$50 respectively. You may submit two stories, but if doing so submit each separately.

Follow the full guidelines and submit through: <http://parsecink.com/contest/>

Send any questions or enquires to the contest coordinator, Brandon Ketchum by email: brandonketchum@gmail.com



Descriptive digression

Factual travel writing benefits from a touch of colour, says Patrick Forsyth

Most travel writing must be factual. You are describing, perhaps recommending, a place, its history or how to get there.

Facts are important, but they can drain away and leave a piece feeling rather pedestrian.

For example: Iceland is a wonderful place, but it is not the cheapest place to visit. When my son competed in a marathon there we went together and I tried hard to find a reasonable priced place to stay and restaurants that did not necessitate a mortgage being taken out. We always ate in one particular restaurant, and always seemed to be served by the same waitress. She told us she was a member of five minority groups: blonde, blue-eyed, Icelandic, female and a lawyer (well, a lawyer in training). She offered good food and also good local advice. Writing a few words about her might have been, unashamedly, an aside, but such a digression can fill out a piece and add meaningful description and interest.

Sometimes such an encounter is fleeting. I have only been to Iceland once and never had contact with that waitress again. Similar encounters have been useful too. The yellow-robed monk I found sitting quietly a little way behind Wat Arun, one of the iconic sights along Bangkok's famous river, who was happy to talk to a stranger. The hotel receptionist who not only provided information about the best location from which to see a famous festival, but said they were just coming off duty and going there themselves, and took me along to ensure my safe arrival.

Just observing something unusual or incongruous is all that is necessary to prompt an idea or a paragraph. Maximising the number of useful encounters does require you to take an initiative on occasion. You get to have a feel for the best times to do so.

Such encounters can not only repeat but do so for a long time. I have two friends – managers of hotels I have stayed in – who have supplied regular information and genuine friendship over many years. But both began with a chance encounter. With such situations a little systematic record keeping is advisable after a first encounter so that you are easily able to stay in touch.

People such as I have mentioned may be worth writing about themselves or they might provide information about things, albeit peripheral things, to enliven a piece. Both are useful. Both are worth seeking out.

FLASHES

Alesha Dixon is judge for the Explore Learning Writers Awards 2019 for young writers. The free-entry competition, for 500-word stories by writers aged 4 to 14, is open from 11 March to 5 May, with prizes of Disneyland holidays for young writers and books for schools. **Website:** www.explorelearning.co.uk/writersawards/

The Writers Guild of Great Britain Awards 2019 winners included Heidi Thomas (Outstanding Contribution to Writing); *Killing Eve* Episode 5, Phoebe Waller Bridge (Best Long-Form TV Drama); *Coronation Street* Episode 9451/2 by Jonathan Harvey (Best Long-Running TV Series); *Detectorists* by Mackenzie Crook (Best TV Situation Comedy); *American Animals* by Bart Layton (Best Screenplay); *Apostasy*, Daniel Kokotajlo (Best First Screenplay); *Gut* by Frances Poet (Best Play) and *Beginners* by Tim Crouch (Best Play for Young Audiences).

Naomi Alderman's prizewinning 2016 sci-fi novel *The Power* is to be adapted into a two-part Amazon TV series. Naomi will write the adaptation and act as executive producer.

Prowling about the rooms, sitting down, getting up, stirring the fire, looking out the window, teasing my hair, sitting down to write, writing nothing, writing something and tearing it up...' **Charles Dickens**

GLOBAL NON-FICTION MARKET

BIG opportunity

PDR Lindsay-Salmon

Caitlin Press is a Canadian publishing company established in 1977 by Carolyn Zonailo as a feminist literary press. In the 1980s, Caitlin Press expanded its mandate to become a British Columbian literary press publishing 'culturally significant books, including fiction, non-fiction (both historical and creative), and poetry' about British Columbia. The editorial team also publish anthologies which are open to subs from writers around the world. Currently they seek 'non-fiction submissions by women of all ages, orientations, colours, and backgrounds for an upcoming anthology of non-fiction prose, working title: *BIG: Thoughts on a Plus-Size Life* exploring the diverse ways women navigate a size-obsessed world.'

Editor Christina Myers is looking for stories about 'how our bodies, self-image, families, and culture shape our individual experiences around size'. Non-fiction pieces, 2,000 to 4,000 words, can range from 'joyful celebration, surprising revelation, grief-filled exploration,

and everything in between'. How do women cope with being 'big' in their working life, domestic life, in their sexual relationships, friendships, motherhood? What about social pressure, and being a 'plus-sized woman in a size-small world?' Work should explore and ask questions about this obsession with women's bodies.

Please submit work by email with a cover letter, an author bio and contact information with phone and email. Put *BIG* – Submission in the subject line. Use a standard publishing format and attach the work to the email. Deadline: 1 April. Response time is 'reasonable'.

'Authors will be remunerated for their contribution' for First Rights.

Details: Caitlin Press, email subs: biganthology@gmail.com; website: <http://caitlin-press.com>



Get your claws into this prize

The Crabbe Competition 2019 is inviting entries.

The competition from Suffolk Poetry Society is for original, unpublished poems up to fifty lines by poets who have born, educated, working or resident in Suffolk, or who are members of Suffolk Poetry Society.

There is a first prize of £600, a second prize of £300 and a

third prize of £150. Two highly commended poets will each win £75.

This year's judge is Tiffany Atkinson, who is Professor of Creative Writing at UEA.

To enter, send poems on single sides of A4. Enter online or by post. Postal entrants must send two copies of each poem, with your name appearing on one copy only. Include

a completed entry form.

The entry fee is £3 per poem, payable by cheques made out to Suffolk Poetry Society or via the online submission system.

The closing date is 29 June.

Details: The Competition Secretary, 23 Century Road, Eye, Suffolk IP23 7LE; website: <https://suffolkpoetrysociety.org.uk/crabbe>

Comedy women line up

A stellar lineup of funny women will be judging the Comedy Women in Print Prize. Marian Keyes and Allison Pearson will be joined on the judging panel by Katy Brand, Susan Calman, Jenny Eclair, Kathy Lette and Shazia Mirza.

The CWIP Prize, which closed at the end of February, is a new award for comic fiction by published and unpublished writers.

'There is a need and a duty for women's voices to be heard,' said Shazia Mirza. 'Especially witty ones since there has been an ongoing protest against women who pursue careers in comedy. We are forever being told we are not funny, so the only way to eliminate this negative and false stereotype is to put women's work and voices out there.'

• If you want to read CWIP's fantastic tips on how to write funny, visit <https://writ.rs/comedytips>

GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

Survival wanted by Remain

Gary Dalkin

Remain Magazine is a new US print bimonthly founded and edited by Ryan Murphy with the aim of publishing the best dystopian, apocalyptic and survival short fiction from both established and upcoming authors. The title will be bimonthly, with the launch issue this spring.

Ryan is looking for character-driven stories in mostly plausible situations, though the more believable the characters are the more fantastical the situation can be. Submissions must feature protagonists struggling to survive in some way, whether in a dystopian society, through an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic event or in some other way. Within these parameters stories can be in any genre.

Stories should be between 1,000-3,000 words. Longer stories suitable for serialisation may be considered. Reprints will be considered if the story has not been published in the last year and you hold appropriate rights. No multiple submissions, but simultaneous submissions are accepted, as long as you notify if accepted elsewhere.

Payment is 6¢ per word and an additional 1¢ per word if included in an anthology or podcast. Payment is for six months' exclusive world rights and non-exclusive archival rights.

Submit a docx file by email: Submissions@RemainMagazine.com
Website: <https://remainmagazine.com/>

UK BOOK MARKET

An eye for new approaches

Tina Jackson

Indie publisher Eye Books and its fiction arm Lightning Books are an object lesson in small publishing adapting to the zeitgeist.

When Dan Hiscocks founded Eye Books in 1996, it was to tell inspirational real-life stories.

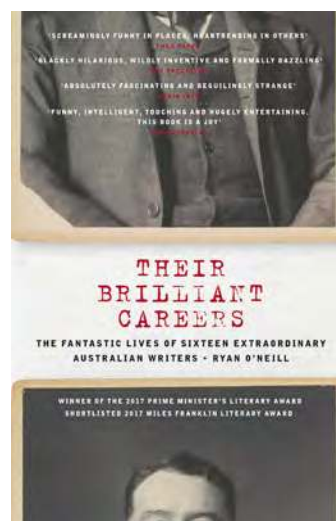
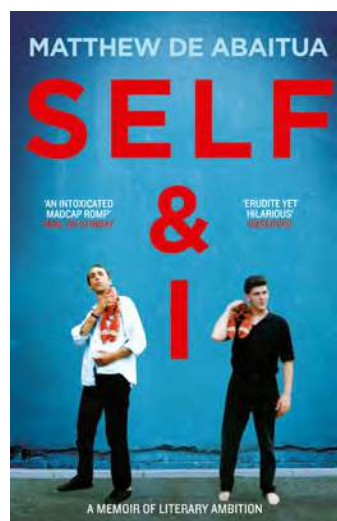
'It came about out of stupidity and stubbornness!' said Dan. 'I set up Eye Books in 1996 – books about extraordinary things done by ordinary people. I'd travelled the world and met people who inspired me, and I wanted to champion them so they could inspire other people. I hoped it would become a lifestyle brand, and go into films, TV, etc. I did realise that we had great stories, but I wasn't necessarily making them into great books.'

Dan moved away from the UK and when he returned, the publishing industry had undergone the seismic shifts that occurred with the advent of ebooks and digital media.

'I spent five years living in America and when I got back Eye Books was on a life support machine,' he said. 'But I saw that with all the changes that had gone on in publishing there was a real opportunity to create a much more collaborative arrangement.'

Having set up a model for working, Dan were able to create a responsive small press that operated with low overheads. 'We're nimble and we can take risks. We're a small team, and operate virtually. We want to take great stories and make them into great books. We don't disguise the fact that we're small, and we keep our outgoings very low. We're only looking to do 15/20 titles a year, which is the capacity of what we can do effectively. Our model is profit share – there's no risk to the author, and our aim is to pay 50% of all profits.'

Eye Books now publishes non-fiction and Lightning Books publishes fiction. 'We have such a breadth, for instance from a history of Trojan Records to dystopian fiction to quite high-end experimental literary fiction,' said Dan. 'We're focused on the stories and the relationship with our authors – we want to find great stories and make them into great books. We're trying to build a club, but if



you enjoyed one of our books you might not necessarily like another. We might have distilled out identity. Our books are quite like cocktails – books that don't necessarily fit into a genre.'

Dan is happy to accept submissions for both Eye Books and Lightning Books. 'I really hope people will submit,' he said. 'That is, from my perspective, part of what I enjoy – getting submissions and dealing with authors, agents, first-time authors. We try to treat everyone the same, and we all get involved before a contract is signed.'

For fiction, send a synopsis and the first three chapters, and for non-fiction, send a proposal and sample chapters.

Eye Books and Lightning Books publish in print and ebook formats.

Details: email: dan@eye-books.com; website: <http://eye-books.com/>

Liz's outstanding achievement

Liz Fielding is the recipient of the RNA's Outstanding Achievement Award 2019.

Liz's first romance, *An Image of You*, was published by Mills & Boon in 1992, since when she has written another 68 Mills & Boon titles, and other books including her writing guide *Little Book of Writing Romance*.

Mills & Boon executive editor Bryony Green has been Liz's editor since 2001. She said: 'Liz Fielding is such a joy to work with – she understands her readers and what they want and always delivers. Her characters feel utterly real, relatable and three-dimensional because Liz has such an ear for dialogue and how dialogue changes with each generation. For that reason her novels feel just as fresh and original as they did when she first began in the early 90s, and that is a rare talent. No wonder she's so beloved by so many readers, authors and editors.'

RNA president Katie Fforde said: 'Liz Fielding's books, with their warmth, humour and emotion, have charmed millions of readers. She is a true star of the romantic fiction genre as well as a long-time supporter of the Romantic Novelists' Association and we are thrilled to recognise her huge contribution to the genre with this award.'

The RNA has also announced that it will be sponsoring two new prizes, The Nicola Cornick Fantasy Romantic Novel Award and The Libertà Books Shorter Romantic Novel Award.

Website: <https://romanticnovelistsassociation.org/>

Costa Cut Out Girl

The Cut Out Girl by Bart van Es is the Costa Book of the Year 2018.

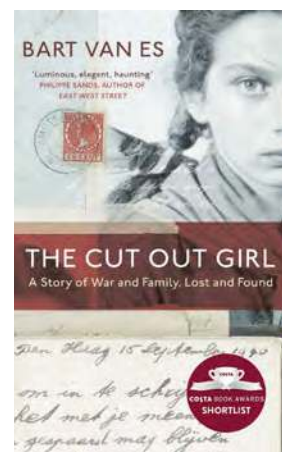
It tells the real-life story of Lien de Jong, a Dutch Jewish girl hidden during WWII in an underground network of foster families that included Bart van Es's grandparents.

Sophie Raworth, chair of the final judges, said: '*The Cut Out Girl* is a unique telling of an extraordinary story. Powerful, moving, uplifting and beautifully written, this is an important book which has huge resonance today. We all felt it was the hidden gem of the year.'

Bart van Es was the winner of the Costa biography category. He beat Costa Book Awards category winners Sally Rooney (novel, *Normal People*), Stuart Turton (debut novel, *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*), JO Morgan (poetry, *Assurances*) and Hilary McKay (children's, *The Skylarks' War*).

The winner of the £3,500 Costa Short Story Award was Caroline Ward Vine for *Breathing Water*.

Website: www.costa.co.uk/costa-book-awards/



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Competition rules and forms

Enter online at **www.writers-online.co.uk** or by post, with the ref code in the address, to: *Writing Magazine* Competitions (Ref Code xxxxx), Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 9PH. Remember to add a front sheet with full contact details and the name of the competition you are entering (see Rule 3)

To enter:

• Genre mash-up short story competition (see p31)

For short stories combining or defying genre conventions, 1,500-1,700 words; entry fee £6, £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 May.

Ref Code: Apr19/Genre

• Leonardo poem competition (see p57)

Poems in any style or structure, max 40 lines, inspired by Leonardo da Vinci; entry fee £6, £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 May.

Ref Code: Apr19/Leonardo

• 750-word competition (see p31)

For fiction, up to 750 words, any style or genre; entry fee £6, £4 for subscribers; closing date, 15 April.

Ref Code: Mar19/750

• Travel competition

Fiction or non-fiction, 1,500-1,700 words, incorporating travel as a key theme ; free entry, subscribers only; closing date, 15 April.

Ref Code: Mar19/Travel

How to enter

WM Competition Rules

1 Eligibility

All entries must be the original and unpublished work of the entrant, and not currently submitted for publication nor for any other competition or award. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry form, printed here (photocopies are acceptable), unless stated.

Open Competitions are open to any writer, who can submit as many entries as they choose. Entry fees are £6, £4 for subscribers.

Subscriber-only Competitions are open only to subscribers of *Writing Magazine*. Entry is free but you can only submit one entry per competition.

2 Entry Fees

Cheques or postal orders should be payable to Warners Group Publications or you can pay by credit card (see form).

3 Manuscripts

Short stories: Entries must be typed in double spacing on single sides of A4 paper with a front page stating your name, address, phone number and email address, your story title and word count and the name of the competition. Entries will be returned if accompanied by sae. Electronic entries should be a single doc, docx, txt, rtf or pdf file with the contact details, etc, on p1, and your story commencing on the second page.

Poetry manuscripts: Entries must be typed in single spacing with double spacing between stanzas on single sides of A4. Entrant's name, address, telephone number and email address must be typed on a separate A4 sheet. Entries to poetry competitions cannot be returned. Electronic entries should be a single doc, docx, txt, rtf, odt or pdf file with the contact details, etc, on p1, and your poem on the second page.

All manuscripts: Receipt of entries will be acknowledged if accompanied by a suitably worded stamped and addressed postcard. Entrants retain copyright in their manuscripts. You are advised not to send the only copy of your manuscript. Enclose an sae if you want your manuscript to be returned.

4 Competition Judging

Competition judges will be appointed by *Writing Magazine* and the judges' decision will be final with no correspondence being entered into.

5. Notification

Winners will be notified within two months of closing date after which date unplaced entries may be submitted elsewhere. Winning entries may not be submitted elsewhere for twelve months after that date without permission of *Writing Magazine* who retain the right to publish winning entries in any form during those twelve months

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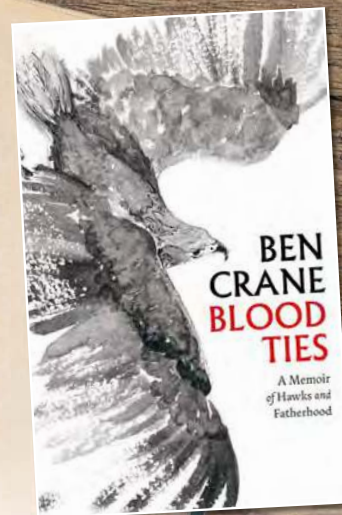
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BEN CRANE

Author of the acclaimed *Blood Ties*, talks to **Lynne Hackles** about his totally immersive creative process



Artist, author and falconer Ben Crane says he doesn't consider himself solely a writer. 'I create "art" full time in one form or another – writing, painting, drawing, filming or taking photographs,' he says. 'When not doing these things then I'm flying and hunting with my hawk and dogs. I also spend time fishing and foraging. Everything interconnects, all of my work revolves around nature in the broadest sense and birds of prey specifically.'

'Writing from an autobiographical angle means my whole life is research. Ideas and inspiration come via the most obscure things. I'm like a magpie, a turn of phrase, a leaf, a dawn, birds, bees and beasts, a headline in the local newspaper, a Radio 4 production, books, my own mind, my own past, nothing escapes, all are picked and pulled apart.'

'Usually I wake early and walk the dogs. I live in a little cottage and head straight out into the fields to think. I have long meandering conversations with myself about how I feel or what subject I have woken up with in my head. Generally I have the best ideas in the first three hours. When I return and if I am in the zone I work solidly all day and evening in one form or another. I've been known to wake up at 3am, do some work then go back to bed. Some days, some weeks, it's simply a case of thinking through the themes and ideas.'

'I knew I wanted to write from the moment I picked up a hawk in my late twenties. It started fifteen years ago as an intense hobby and grew from there. This was the inspiration. However, I've always been communicating my feelings about the natural world almost from the moment I was born. I had no real career

"On a day-to-day basis my mind is dysfunctional, hyper-sensitive, anxious and confused when in contact with the human world. Applied to the correct activity it becomes a powerful tool."

plan or background in writing.

'I've always felt a sense of difference and to a certain extent dislocation and confusion about the human world. It was only after the complete collapse of my life at the age of 43 and an intense period of counselling the therapist suggested along with other issues, my train of thought, behaviours, success and failures where consistent with Asperger's. This recognition helped a lot. I could learn to love my weirdness and not feel guilty about not interacting or behaving in a way that might be considered "abnormal". I was, to a certain degree, hard wired to be the person I am.'

'In terms of writing, I've always experienced the world erratically, struggled to find meaning and clarity in my existence. On a day-to-day basis my mind is dysfunctional, hyper-sensitive, anxious and confused when in contact with the human world. Applied to the correct activity it becomes a powerful tool.'

'Initially I work fast and hard on set pieces, notes and fragments of thoughts or ideas. I like the fluid sensation of these first words, their intonation and flow. Long before they are shredded by the rules of punctuation and edits, they are free to form a stream of consciousness – one long sentence that only makes sense to me. This is the stage where the adrenaline joy lasts longest.'

'Editing is the hardest part. I

can spend a week on a single line or paragraph unravelling all the permutations. When the writing slows to a trickle, rather than stasis I begin to skip around the work tweaking and touching all over. When I hit a proper wall, I break the day up into sections. I walk the same route and think. My day disappears, write, walk, think, write, walk, think... When it clicks, when I have cut twenty words to five, retained clarity, achieved simplicity and still held onto meaning I dance around the room with joy.'

'I've succeeded as a writer because I ignored my weakness – punctuation and spelling – and concentrated on what I am good at, description, sensation and wonder. I read a lot of books, joined a writers' group, asked for help. I learned to fail and keep going. I succeeded because I find it fun. It gives meaning to my life, to my time on the planet.'

'My first book was about training sparrowhawks. This one, *Blood Ties*, is about different landscapes (internal and external), different cultures and different species of birds of prey. It's about life and death, transformation and change, the healing power of the natural world and learning to love a son and accept my own identity.' **W.M.**



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My Writing Place

'My small, 300-year-old cottage is my studio. I don't have central heating, double glazing, a washing machine, hot water, internet, TV or landline – NO distractions.'

'My paintings, pictures, books and photographs are pinned about. My battered old laptop has the e missing and is covered in drops of paint and dust, but feels nice to type on. The huge open fire crackles and smells divine in the winter. The dogs sit on the sofa and keep the mice company. I play music when I write or paint. It's a safe, natural space. It is part of me.'

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A HELPING HANDFUL

When a stranger calls,
Lorraine Mace's helpfulness
is sorely tested



I answered my phone the other day to hear a voice I didn't recognise say, 'Hi Lorraine, my name is John and Gary said you're the right person to help me.'

Gary runs the local charity where I often donate books as raffle prizes, so I assumed he had told the man I work with authors on their manuscripts. Sure enough, the caller had written a book and needed advice, but not the kind I could provide.

I'm going to recreate here (as much as I am able) the conversation which followed.

'What can I do for you, John?'

'Gary says you know how to print books.'

'I take it you've written a book and now need some professional feedback?'

A short silence followed. 'What do you mean feedback?'

'Well,' I said, 'I'm assuming you need someone to read it and offer advice on editing and—'

I didn't get the chance to finish that sentence. 'Oh, I don't need anything like that. My mum has read it for me.'

Deep breath, Lorraine. Maybe his mother is a proof-reader, or has a degree in English. 'Do you have other beta readers?' I asked. Silence again from John before he asked, 'What are those?'

I went into some detail about how important it was to get as many people as possible to read and comment before submitting the book to an agent or publisher.

'That's not necessary,' John said. 'I told you, my mum read it. She says

it's brilliant.'

I almost bit through my tongue. Most mums are so proud their offspring has written a book, they are not likely to be the best people to offer critical advice. Anyway, by this stage, it was clear that John wasn't looking for feedback on his manuscript, so I asked again how I could help him.

'I need a printer,' he said.

'Are you looking to self-publish?'

'No,' John replied. 'I want to get it printed.'

'But that's self-publishing,' I said.

'I don't think I'm the right person to help you with that, as I know very little about it.'

'But Gary said you've printed lots of books.'

Deep breath again from me. 'I haven't printed any books, but I have had some published.'

'Well, that's what I want to know. How did you get them printed?'

'My publisher had them printed,'

I said, praying he didn't ask who my publisher was or ask for an introduction. I am always happy to help other writers, but no way am I going to recommend a manuscript that has only been read by one person other than the author – and that person being his mother. But, of course, my prayer was in vain.

'That's what I need then. Can you give me your publisher's number?'

I spent a few wasted minutes explaining the process of manuscript submission, searching out the right publisher and making sure the work

fitted with their list, to no avail as he was determined recommending his work was the least I could do to help a friend of Gary's. Privately planning to take Gary to one side and point out the error of his ways, I asked how long they had been pals.

'Well, we're not exactly friends,' John said. 'It's just that I know Gary runs the local newspaper and I went and asked him where I could get my book printed. I thought, seeing as he's in the trade, he'd know, but he said you'd be more likely to help me.'

At that point my thoughts towards Gary turned very dark and he became one of my least favourite people. Clearly he'd palmed the man off on me to get rid of him.

'I'm sorry, John,' I said. 'I can't introduce you to my publisher, but if you give me your email address I can send you some links to help you get your book published. Or, if you want to self-publish, Amazon has a good system for ebooks and paperbacks. There are also many sites offering advice on how to format the manuscript.'

'So you can't help me then?' John said, with an edge to his voice. I repeated the offer I'd just made and asked again for his email address.

'Don't bother,' he said. 'Gary was wrong about you. You're not helpful.'

With that, the phone went dead. I haven't yet seen Gary, but when I do, I will explain in minute detail exactly how he is going to suffer in a future DI Sterling novel. **WM**

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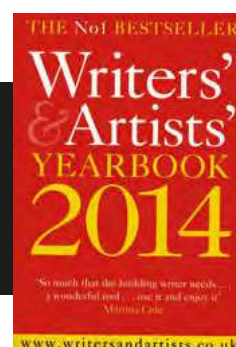
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Competition Special 2019

Dear Reader

Long-term WM readers might notice a bit of a change to this year's competition listings. New readers, buckle in – you're unlikely to make it through this guide's 32 pages without finding something to spark your creative fire.

Since time immemorial, we've focused mostly on competitions based in the UK, or aimed at UK writers. But these days, with information available globally more quickly than you can buy a stamp (assuming you still have a Post Office), it only makes sense for modern writers to widen their nets. So we've done the same and included international competitions, more than doubling the number of opportunities in the process. Since most competitions are now conducted electronically more than by post, there's no obstacle to sending your winning words halfway round the world for the chance of a win. And nearly all are open to submissions from writers anywhere. (And those that are restricted to natives have been marked as such. The only restriction we've applied is that entries must be in English!)

You'll find competitions for everything from eight-line poems to slabs of scholarly research, from nonsense verse to epic novels, with prizes from bookmarks and badges to professional development and publication, even – uniquely – a luxury 3-bedroom house. Not to mention lots and lots of cash.

So dive in, investigate more than 500 opportunities to potentially get published and earn some cash, and, at the very least, try writing in different styles and different markets. Now more than ever, the writing world is at your fingertips!

Jonathan Telfer, Editor



Winning words

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p6 - Creative writing competitions 2019
 Your definitive guide to over 450 international writing competitions,
 with total prize money of over **£825,000!**

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Open competitions

Sharpen your pencils and plots with a sneak peek at our competition programme for the end of 2019

All the competitions previewed on this page are open to any writer. Enter online at www.writers-online.co.uk or see the relevant issue of *Writing Magazine* for more details. Prizes are **£200** and **£50** each month, with publication in *WM* for the winner.

Please note, competitions will open for entries on publication of the full competition details in the relevant issue of Writing Magazine.

**£250
TO BE WON
EVERY MONTH**

JULY Dark Tales

Head for the shadows for this month's competition, which invites fiction with an edge. It could be spooky or chilling, or just dealing with the darker side of human psychology, but you'll need to leave us feeling more than a little uncomfortable.

AUGUST Love

The perennial theme is back for our ever popular annual competition. Who loves whom – or even what – is entirely up to you, but we'll be expecting you to pluck our heartstrings whatever you choose.

SEPTEMBER Modern speculative

Fantastical stories, in their many variants, are everywhere you look these days, from scifi teen romance to big budget dramas with supernatural twists, from grimdark war stories to magic realist happy-ever-afters, not to mention modern fairy tales. The level of fantasy is up to you, but make sure you give us a taste of the unknown for this competition.

OCTOBER Flash Fiction

Give us a flash! You have an open brief in terms of subject matter and theme: your story can be about whatever you like as long as you wow us in no more than 500 words.

NOVEMBER Epistolary

Letter, email, PostIt, blog post, diary, Twitter feed, shopping list... there are endless possibilities for using different documentary methods to tell your story, opening up intriguing plotting possibilities. Surprise us!

DECEMBER Open Short Story

Any theme, any topic, any style... the biggest competition of the year is open for absolutely anything but up against stiff competition so make it your best!

SUBSCRIBER-ONLY

Short story competitions

The short story competitions previewed here are open only to subscribers of *Writing Magazine*. Enter online at www.writers-online.co.uk or see the relevant issue of *WM* for more details. Prizes are **£100** and **£25** each month, with publication in *WM* for the winner.

£125
TO BE WON
EVERY MONTH

JULY

New start

A simple prompt to set you off on a new story! Who or what is having a new start, and how it works out, is, of course, entirely up to you.



SEPTEMBER

Single character

No dialogue, no first-hand interaction. How will you convey drama and change with only a single character to play with?



NOVEMBER

Food

Leave us salivating with your stories for this month, which should involve food in some capacity. Capture the importance of the family dinner, leave us begging for more with its absence, or whisk us away with a sensory madeleine? The final recipe is up to you.



Open poetry competitions

£150
TO BE WON
EVERY MONTH

AUGUST

Holiday postcard

Sending sunshine home or sharing the woe? It's up to you as you compose your poetic holiday postcard.



OCTOBER

Christmas

A rich source of material, Christmas is a gift for poets but a very popular one, so you'll need to surprise us!



DECEMBER

Open

As ever, we end the year with our annual Open competition. There are no limits on structure, just send us your best poem of the year.



COMPETITION GUIDE 2019

Pick your favourites and start scheduling your entries with over 250 competitions to enter. This could be the year you win big!

APRIL

Alpine Fellowship Writing Prize

Prose on theme 'identity', up to 2,500 words

Prizes: £10,000; £3,000, £2,000

Free entry

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://alpinefellowship.com/>

Cowles Poetry Book Prize

Poetry collections, 48-100 pages

Prizes: \$2,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.semopress.com/events/cowles-prize/

FanStory

Busy programme of comps, closing every few days, for virtually everything

Prizes: \$100 each comp

Free, but for (paid) site members only

Closing date: constant

www.fanstory.com

Gemini Magazine Short Story

Short stories of any length

Prizes: \$5,000 and publication, \$250, 3x\$50

Entry fee: \$10

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.gemini-magazine.com

Killer Nashville Claymore Award

Unpublished manuscripts with elements of thriller, mystery, crime or suspense

Prizes: \$3,000 prize fund, plus publication

Entry fee: \$40

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://killernashville.com/claymore/>

Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, longer than 48 pages

Prizes: \$1,500, \$500 and publication

Entry fee: \$30

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://saturnaliabooks.com/poetry-prize/>

Orison Books Poetry and Fiction

Novels, novellas or fiction collections, at least 30,000 words; poetry collections, 50-100 pages

Prizes: \$1,500 and publication in each category

Entry fee: \$30

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://orisonbooks.com>

Psychopomp Short Fiction Award

Short stories, 6,000 words max, pushing the boundaries of genre/form

Prizes: \$500 and publication

Entry fee: \$10

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://psychopompmag.com/contests/>

Short Grain Contest

Poetry, max 100 lines; fiction, max 2,500 words

Prizes: Can\$1,000, \$750, \$500 and

publication, in each category

Entry fee: \$40, international entries \$60

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.grainmagazine.ca

SPR Book Prizes

Books published on Amazon before entry, never available elsewhere

Prizes: SPR reader review packages on Amazon

Entry fee: \$30

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.selfpublishingreview.com

Stringybark Short Story Award

Short stories, up to 1,500 words

Prizes: TBC, see website

Entry fee: TBC

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.stringybarkstories.net

The Pinch Literary Awards

Fiction and non-fiction, each under 5,000 words; up to 3 poems, any length

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication in each category

Entry fee: \$20, \$10 each additional

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.pinchjournal.com

Tusculum Review Poetry Chapbook Prize

Poetry manuscripts, 20-30 pages

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 1 Apr

<https://web.tusculum.edu/tusculumreview/contest/>

Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest

Highly enjoyable annual competition for humorous and spoof poetry, up to 250 lines

Prizes: \$1,000, \$250, 10x\$100

Free entry

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.winningwriters.com/wergle

Zone 3 Press Creative Non-Fiction Award

Unpublished NF manuscripts, 120-300 pages

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 1 Apr

www.zone3press.com

Leicester Writes Short Story Prize

Short stories up to 3,000 words

Prizes: £100, £50

Entry fee: £7, £3 Leicestershire writers

Closing date: 2 Apr

<http://leicesterwrites.co.uk>

Edge Hill Short Story Prize

Published short story collections

Prizes: £10,000, £1,000 Readers' Prize

Free entry

Closing date: 5 Apr

www.edgehill.ac.uk

Furious fiction

500-word short stories, written in 55 hours

Prizes: Aus\$500

Free entry

Closing date: 7 Apr, first Sunday each month

www.writerscentre.com.au/furious-fiction/

Cleveland State University Poetry Center

Full-length poetry collections, over 48 pages, by poets who have had no, or one, collection published; essay collections, 100-300 pages
Prizes: 3x\$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$28
Closing date: 5 Apr
www.csupoetrycenter.com

GVCA New Deal Writing Comp

Short stories, up to 10,000 words, inspired by a painting
Prizes: \$200, \$100, \$50
Entry fee: \$5
Closing date: 5 Apr
<http://gvartscouncil.org/writingcompetition/>

Tethered by Letters F(r)iction Competitions

Short stories, 1,000-7,500 words; poems, any form, up to 3 pages; flash, up to 750 words; creative non-fiction, 1,000-7,500 words
Prizes: short stories, \$1,000; poetry and flash, \$300; creative non-fiction \$500; and publication
Entry fee: \$15 short stories, \$8 poetry and flash; \$10 creative non-fiction
Closing date: 5 Apr
<https://tetheredbyletters.com/>

Write a Letter, Win a House

A 350-word letter explaining how moving to the prize house would change your life
Prize: A 3-bedroom house in Alberta, Canada, valued at Can\$1.7m
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 5 Apr
www.facebook.com/WriteALetterWinAHouse

Four Way Books Levis Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 48-100 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 7 Apr
<https://fourwaybooks.com/site/guidelines/>

Oberon Poetry Prize

Single poems, submit up to 3
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$18
Closing date: 10 Apr
www.oberonpoetry.com

Laura Literary Awards

Short stories, up to 1,500 words; poems, up to 60 lines
Prizes: Aus\$780 prize fund
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 12 Apr
www.rockyriverrriters.club

Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry

Poetry collections, 48-100 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication; \$500
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.uofupress.com/ali-poetry-prize.php

StAnza Scotland's International Poetry Festival

StAnza 2019: 6-10 March



One of the top poetry festivals in the UK, StAnza is famous for its friendly atmosphere and international focus, the place to hear favourite poets, discover new voices and enjoy the beautiful town of St Andrews and StAnza's lively festival hub. The 2019 programme includes recent Costa Prize winner J.O. Morgan, Liz Berry, Imtiaz Dharker, Ishion Hutchinson, Menna Elfyn, Caroline Bird, Fiona Moore, Alan Spence, George Mario Angel Quintero, Gerda Stevenson, Matthew Stewart and many, many more. This year's themes are Off the Page and Another Place and there will be a spotlight on poetry from the Mediterranean and beyond.



Choose from more than 80 readings, performances, discussions, poetry inspired installations and exhibitions and other cross-media performances in a range of atmospheric venues in and around the historic and lively town centre, take part in a wide range of workshops, a masterclass and open mic events, or just sit and enjoy the lively festival scene with a coffee or drink. Tickets are on sale now with concessions, bulk purchase and early bird discounts, and many free events.



email: boxoffice@stanzapoetry.org

Tel: 01334 475000

www.stanzapoetry.org

Monologue Adventures

Monologues, max 750 words, for a woman reader, by Australian residents
Prizes: Multiple Aus\$100 prizes
Free entry
Closing date: 14 Apr
<https://contentandculturalprojects.wordpress.com/about-tma/>

Bath Short Story Award

Short stories up to 2,200 words, in any style and on any subject
Prizes: £1,200, £300, £100; £50 for best local writer; £100 for best unpublished writer
Entry fee: £8
Closing date: 15 Apr
<http://bathshortstoryaward.org>

CantoMundo Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 48-90 pages, by Latina or Latino writers
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$28
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.uapress.com/prizes/

Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize

Unpublished short stories between 2,000 and 5,000 words
Prizes: Aus \$5,000, \$3,000, \$2,000; \$2,500 between 3 commended
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.australianbookreview.com.au

Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest

Deliberately bad opening lines to novels, comic writing inspired by Edward Bulwer-Lytton's notorious *Paul Clifford* opening, 'It was a dark and stormy night...'
Prizes: Modest prizes (\$250 Grand Prize), but a lot of interest
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.bulwer-lytton.com

Etal Adnan Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 48-90 pages, by a writer of Arab heritage
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.uapress.com/prizes/

New Ohio Review Prizes

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 20 pages, and poetry, up to 6
Prizes: \$1,000 in each category
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.ohio.edu/nor/

Panther Creek Book Award in Non-Fiction

Unpublished book-length non-fiction
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$22
Closing date: 15 Apr
<https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com>

Hektoen International Essay Competition

Articles, up to 1,600 words, related to medical humanities
Prizes: \$3,000 plus publication
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Apr
<https://hekint.org/2017/09/05/grand-prix-submission-guidelines/>

Living Springs Publishers Stories Through the Ages Competition

Short stories, 900-4,000 words, in two categories, Baby Boomers Plus for those born before 1964, and Generations Plus for those born after
Prizes: \$500, \$200, \$100 in each category
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Apr
<http://livingspringpublishers.com>

Puerto Del Sol Competitions

Fiction and non-fiction, max 25 pages; up to 3 poems
Prizes: \$500 and publication in each category
Entry fee: \$9
Closing date: 15 Apr
[www.puertodelsol.org/submit](http://puertodelsol.org/submit)

Slope Editions Book Prize

Unpublished poetry collections, 40-90 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Apr
www.slopeeditions.org

C Michael Curtis Short Story Book Prize

Short story collections, 140-220 pages, by writers who have lived in the US southern states
Prizes: \$10,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 16 Apr
<https://hubcity.org/press/c-michael-curtis-short-story-book-prize/>

Straid Collection Award

A collection of new poetry (38+ pages)
Prizes: Publication by Templar Poetry
Entry fee: £23, online £25
Closing date: 16 Apr
<http://templarpoeetry.com>

Pen Parentis Writing Fellowship

A short story, up to 750 words, by the parent of a child aged under 10
Prizes: \$1,000 plus public reading in New York
Entry fee: \$15, two for \$20
Closing date: 17 Apr
www.penparentis.org

Billy Roche One Act Play Award

One act plays, up to 15 minutes
Prizes: €300, €200, €100
Entry fee: €10
Closing date: 19 Apr
www.wexfordliteraryfestival.com

New Southern Voices Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 48-120 pages, by poets who have lived in the US southern states
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 17 Apr
<https://hubcity.org/press/new-southern-voices-poetry-prize>

Drummond Poetry Contest

Poems, up to 50 lines, by Canadian residents
Prizes: Can\$300, \$200, \$100, 8x\$75, 8x\$50
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 19 Apr
www.springpulsepoetryfestival.com/drummond.html

Connell Guides Essay Prize

Essays by English lit students on a novel, poem or play that has most impacted them
Prizes: £250 sixth form prize, £100 Amazon voucher GCSE prize, Connell Guides, 2x£50 vouchers for runners up
Free entry
Closing date: 20 Apr TBC
www.connellguides.com/webform/essay-prize

53-word Story Contest

Stories of exactly 53 words, to a different prompt each month
Prizes: Publication in *Prime Number*; free book
Free entry
Closing date: 21 Apr; 21st of each month
www.press53.com/53word-story-contest

Poetry Kit Spring Competition

Poetry of any length on any subject
Prizes: £100, £50
Entry fee: £3.50, £8 for 3, £10 for 5
Closing date: 21 Apr TBC
www.poetrykit.org

Shooter Short Story Competition

Stories up to 5,000 words
Prizes: £500, £100
Entry fee: £7
Closing date: 21 Apr
<http://shooterlitmag.com>

Fogarty Literary Award

Fiction or narrative non-fiction manuscripts, 50,000-120,000 words, by a Western Australian writer aged 18-35
Prizes: \$20,000 and publication
Free entry
Closing date: 22 Apr
www.fremantlepress.com.au/fogarty-award

Sixfold Short Story and Poetry Contest

Short stories, up to 20 pages, and poetry, up to 10 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication, in each category
Entry fee: \$5
Closing date: 23 Apr; quarterly
www.sixfold.org

Omnidawn Publishing Broadside Poetry Prize

Single poems, 8-24 lines
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$10, \$5 each additional
Closing date: 22 Apr
<http://omnidawn.com>

Poets Meet Politics International Open Poetry Competition

Poems up to 40 lines, related to politics
Prizes: €500, €250, €100
Entry fee: €12 for up to three
Closing date: 22 Apr
<http://hungryhillwriting.eu>

Diagram/New Michigan Press Chapbook Contest

Chapbook-length prose and poetry manuscripts, 18-44 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 26 Apr
www.thediagram.com/contest.html

Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry

Up to three poems, max 10 lines total
Prizes: \$1,500
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.bpj.org/submit/rich-award-guidelines

Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, over 48 pages, by unpublished poets
Prizes: \$5,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.upress.pitt.edu/prize/

Berkshire Prize

First or second poetry collection, 48-88 pages
Prizes: \$3,000 plus publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.tupelopress.org/contests

Craft Short Fiction Award

Short stories up to 5,000 words
Prizes: \$2,000, \$500 and \$300, and publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.craftliterary.com

Family Matters Contest

Stories, 500-5,000 words, about families
Prizes: \$2,500, \$500, \$300
Entry fee: \$18
Closing date: 30 Apr last ever
www.glimmertrain.com

Glimmer Train Short Story Award

Short stories, up to 12,000 words
Prizes: \$700 and publication
Entry fee: \$2
Closing date: 30 Apr last ever
www.glimmertrain.com

Al Blanchard Award

Crime fiction, up to 5,000 words, set in New England or by authors from there

Prizes: \$100

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Apr

<http://crimebake.org/al-blanchard-award/>

Dark Tales Short Story

Ongoing monthly comp for horror and sci-f short stories, up to 5,000 words

Prizes: £100 each month plus publication

Entry fee: £4

Closing date: 30 Apr; last day of each month

www.darktales.co.uk

Earlyworks Press Poetry Comp

Poems, up to 40 lines

Prizes: £100, £25, multiple £5 web prizes

Entry fee: £3.50, £15 up to 6

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.earlyworkspress.co.uk

Ghost Story Supernatural Fiction Award

Short stories, 1,500-10,000 words, with supernatural themes, broadly defined

Prizes: \$1,000, 2x\$250

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.theghoststory.com

Edinburgh International Flash Fiction Competition

Stories up to 250 words

Prizes: £500

Entry fee: £4, £16 up to six

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.storyawards.org

Geoffrey Whitworth Competition

One-act plays first performed in United Kingdom One-act Plays Festivals

Prize: The Geoffrey Whitworth Trophy

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.actf.org.uk

Golden Grassroots Chapbook Contest

Poetry manuscripts of 24 pages, max 35 lines each, by Canadian citizens

Prizes: \$50 and 50 chapbooks

Entry fee: \$15

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.theontariopoetrysociety.ca

Grey Hen Poetry Competition

For poems, up to 40 lines, by women 60+

Prizes: £100, £50, £25, website publication

Entry fee: £3, £10 for four

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.greyhenpress.com

Grouse Grind Prize for V Short Forms

Flash fiction and non-fiction, up to 300 words

Prizes: Can\$500, \$150, \$50

Entry fee: \$15

Closing date: 30 Apr TBC

<http://prismmagazine.ca/contests/>

Henry Lawson Society Awards

Rhyming verse, free verse, 50 lines max each, short stories, max 1,000 words

Prizes: Aus\$600, \$300, \$150 in each category

Entry fee: \$10

Closing date: 30 Apr

<http://henrylawsonsociety.org>

Hillary Gravendyk Prize

Poetry collections, 48-100 pages, by US poets

Prizes: \$1,000; \$1,000 for best entry from South California

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 30 Apr

<http://inlandia institute.org>

Iowa Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 50-150 pages

Prizes: Publication by University of Iowa Press under a standard contract

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 30 Apr

www.uiowa.edu/authors/iowa-prize.htm

Winner profile

Body-snatching's better than the workhouse, but only just. I suppose I'd have liked to go to school or something, if I'd been born to a family with money. Or a family at all. But God gives what he gives. Tonight, he's given me a Devil of a job. The rain soaks deep into my ragged shirt, chilling the skin of my shoulders. It already made its way through my over-cloak on the long trek up the muddy hill to the cemetery. The cloak drags like a millstone at my neck. If I could see through the haze of water being blown into my face, I'd be looking into the midnight world of London's far reaches. It's less smoggy here, the air filled with the damp scent of earth instead. Fresh graves. Just what Master Kabil needs.

JOHN NORWICH

I can't read the name out loud. I don't know much about how letters go together. But Kabil always writes it clearly for me, so I can match it to the etching on the headstone, or the carving in the wood if they haven't prepared a stone yet. This bloke's got neither of those things. I stand above a mound of earth, encased in bars of iron. I look at Kabil's note, then at the plaque on the bars. It's him. My sigh hits the air as a cloud of vapour, a pale ghost pelted into nothingness by the rain. I drop my things onto the wet grass beside the bars: a rope, a sack and a wooden spade. My hands tingle at the tips as I sink them into the damp earth around the nearest bar, shoving hard until I'm elbow-deep in mud.

KC Finn won the WM Mid Story

Sentence competition with

My Brother's Keeper.

Read the full story and judging

comments at

<https://writ.rs/kcfinn>



What a satisfyingly sinister story KC Finn wrote in *My Brother's Keeper*, the winning entry in our Mid-Story Sentence competition. It grips and intrigues from its opening sentence.

Any story that includes body-snatching as a theme has got to be shady and gruesome, and *My Brother's Keeper* delivers on both counts. Rather than graphic descriptions, though, KC has conjured atmosphere so potent it rolls off the page. The mud, the weather, the fog and the scent of freshly turned graveyard earth all set the scene for strange goings on.

And they are, convincingly, strange. The graveyard setting and the historical crime of bodysnatching locate the story in an unnamed but apparently bygone past in which the fantasy element in *My Brother's Keeper* feels perfectly at home. This is all centred round the ominous figure of Kabil, the narrator's master, who is built up with each telling detail in the first-person narration, making it evident that he wants the bodies for an arcane purpose even more disturbing than is usual for bodysnatched corpses. We accept this world on the terms KC creates because she makes it all seem credible: this atmospheric world of sorcery has its own believable logic.

The first-person narration allows readers to experience the unfolding drama through the narrator's eyes as they move from ignorance to a position of knowledge that incites action. The tension is well controlled throughout as narrator and reader both gain insight into what Kabil is doing. The twist, when the table turns and *My Brother's Keeper* moves towards its grisly climax, is a perfect fit for its setting – a deeply satisfying conclusion to a darkly enjoyable tale. **WM**

Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize

Poetry collections, 48-84 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication; 2x\$250
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 30 Apr
<https://marshhawkpress.org>

Momaya Press Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 3,000 words on the theme of 'trading places'
Prizes: £110, £55, £25, and publication
Entry fee: £11
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.momayapress.com

Mudfish Poetry Prize

Up to three poems, any length
Prizes: \$1,200
Entry fee: \$20, \$3 each additional
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.mudfish.org

Myriad First Drafts Competition

Prose fiction by an unpublished writer
Prizes: One-week writing retreat at West Dean College, detailed feedback, mentoring TBC
Entry fee: £10
Closing date: 30 Apr TBC
www.myriadeditions.com

National Flash Fiction Day Prize

Short stories, up to 300 words, by New Zealand residents
Prizes: NZ\$1,000, \$400, \$100; \$200, \$100 and \$50 youths
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 30 Apr TBC
<https://nationalflash.org/competition/>

NAWG Open '100' Mini-tale Competition

Rolling competition for flash fiction of exactly 100 words, will be judged when 100 entries have been received then start again
Prizes: £75, £25 every 100 entries
Entry fee: £3, £5 for two, £8 for three
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.nawg.co.uk

New Women's Voices Chapbook

Chapbook poetry collections, 16-35 by unpublished women
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$16
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.finishinglinepress.com/submit/

Tamworth Literary Festival Comp

Short stories and poems in three categories: adults 1,500 words; ages 7-11, 1,000 words; under 6, 500 words
Prizes: £100, £50, £25; 7-11, £50, £25, £15; 6, £20, £15, £10
Entry fee: £4 in adult category, otherwise free
Closing date: 30 Apr
<https://tamlitfest.wordpress.com>

Nimrod Literary Awards

Fiction up to 7,500 words or 3-10 pages of poetry, by US residents
Prizes: \$2,000, \$1,000 in both categories, plus publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 30 Apr
<https://nimrod.utulsa.edu/awards.html>

Poetica Christi Press Annual Poetry Competition

Poems on 'love's footprint', max 50 lines, by Australian residents
Prizes: Aus\$300, \$100
Entry fee: \$7
Closing date: 30 Apr
<http://poeticachristi.org.au>

Poetry International Prize

Poems, submit up to 3
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$15, \$3 each additional
Closing date: 30 Apr
<https://poetryinternational.sdsu.edu/>

Richard Snyder Publication Prize

Poetry collections, 64-96 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$27
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.ashlandpoetrypress.com

SA Writers College Short Story Competition

Short stories, up to 2,000 words by unpublished South African writers
Prizes: R10,000, R5,000, R2,500
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.sawriterscollege.co.za/

Sequestum Reprint Award

Fiction and non-fiction, any length; poetry, any length – all previously published elsewhere
Prizes: \$200 plus publication
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.sequestum.org

Southport Writers' Circle International Poetry

Poems, up to 40 lines
Prizes: £150, £75, £25, humour prize £25
Entry fee: £3 or £10 for four
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.swconline.co.uk

Swanwick Writers' School Comp

Short stories, poems and writing for children on the theme of 'close call'
Prizes: Inclusive week at Swanwick Writers' Summer School for each category winner, WM manuscript appraisal for second-winners, Writers' & Artists' Yearbook for third
Entry fee: £6
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.swanwickwritersschool.org.uk

Tom Howard/John H Reid Fiction and Essay Contest

Short stories, essays or other prose, up to 6,000 words. International entries welcome
Prizes: \$2,000 in each category, ten honourable mentions each \$100
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.winningwriters.com/tomstory

Ver Poets Open Poetry Competition

For poetry, up to 30 lines; open theme/form
Prizes: £600, £300, £100, publication in The Ver Prize anthology and on website
Entry fee: £4, £10 for three, £3 each extra
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.verpoets.org.uk

Ware Poets Open Poetry Competition

Poems up to 50 lines
Prizes: £600, £300, £150, £150 sonnet prize
Entry fee: £4, £12 for four, £3 thereafter
Closing date: 30 Apr
www.poetrypf.co.uk

Writing District Monthly Competitions

Short stories, up to 3,000 words
Prizes: \$50
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Apr, last day of each month
<https://thewritingdistrict.com/>

Writing Quarter

Monthly; short stories, up to 3,000 words
Prizes: Aus\$30
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Apr last of each month
<https://writingquarter.com.au>

MAY

Atlanta Review International Poetry Competition

Up to three poems, any length
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 1 May
<http://atlantareview.com>

Bristol Short Story Prize

Stories on any theme, up to 4,000 words
Prizes: £1,000, £500, £250, 17 £100 shortlisted. All published in prize anthology
Entry fee: £9
Closing date: 1 May
www.bristolprize.co.uk

Carter V Cooper Short Fiction Competition

Short fiction, up to 10,000 words
Prizes: Can\$10,000, \$5,000
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 1 May TBC
www.exileeditions.com

Crucible Poetry and Fiction Competition

Short stories up to 8,000 words; up to 5 poems
Prizes: \$150, \$100
Free entry
Closing date: 1 May
www.barton.edu/crucible/

Curt Johnson Prose Awards

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 8,000 words
Prizes: \$1,500, \$500 and publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 May
<https://decembermag.org>

Fischer Prize

Poems, no longer than 3 pages, by US poets
Prizes: \$1,000 plus \$500 travel to awards ceremony; 5x\$200 plus \$100; \$500 for best entry from a Colorado poet
Entry fee: \$9
Closing date: 1 May
www.tellurideinstitute.org/fischer-prize/

Gwendolyn MacEwen Poetry Competition

A suite of poems, up to 24 pages
Prizes: Can\$1,500, \$1,000, \$500 best poem by a Canadian
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 May TBC
www.exileeditions.com

Gulf Coast Contests

Stories and essays, up to 25 pages, or up to 5 poems of no more than 10 pages
Prizes: \$1,500, 2x\$250, in each category
Entry fee: \$23
Closing date: 1 May
www.gulfcoastmag.org

Ilkley Literature Festival Short Story and Poetry Competitions

All TBC. Last year for flash up to 500 words, poetry, 30 lines, short stories, 3,000 words
Prizes: £200 in the short story category, £200, £100 and £75 in the poetry category
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 1 May TBC
www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk

Mairtín Crawford Awards

3-5 poems; short stories, up to 2,500 words
Prizes: £500 and 3 nights at The Water Mill retreat in each category
Entry fee: £6
Closing date: 1 May
<https://belfastbookfestival.com>

Moon City Press Poetry Award

Poetry collections, over 48 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 May TBC
<http://moon-city-press.com/poetry-contest/>

Malahat Review Far Horizons Award

Short fiction, up to 3,500 words
Prizes: Can\$1,000
Entry fee: International entries \$35
Closing date: 1 May
www.malahatreview.ca

Meyerson Fiction Prize

Short stories, up to 8,000 words, by writers who have not had a book published
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 May
www.smu.edu/SouthwestReview/Prizes-and-Awards/MeyersonFictionPrize

Pleiades Press Editor's Prize for Poetry

Unpublished poetry collections, over 48 pages
Prizes: \$3,000 plus publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 May
<http://pleiadespress.org>

Poetry London Clore Prize

Poetry up to 80 lines
Prizes: £5,000, £2,000, £1,000, 4 x £500
Entry fee: £7, £3 subscribers
Closing date: 1 May
<http://poetrylondon.co.uk/competition/>

The Yeovil Literary Prize

This internationally acclaimed competition is open for entries on 1 January, and offers opportunities for all writers. Now in its sixteenth year, we know several past winners have achieved success in the publishing world.

There are FOUR categories, with significant cash prizes.

NOVEL

Synopsis and opening chapters, up to 15,000 words

SHORT STORY

Up to a maximum of 2,000 words

POEM

A poem with a maximum of 40 lines

WRITING WITHOUT RESTRICTION

Exciting and original - write whatever you like!

CLOSING DATE 31st MAY 2019

The competition is organised by the Yeovil Community Arts Association with highly esteemed guest judges from the literary world

For full entry details please see our website at

www.yeovilprize.co.uk

Or write to Liz Pike at YCAA, The Octagon Theatre, YEOVIL, BA20 1UX for an entry form. Please send an SAE.

The Yeovil Community Arts Association is a registered charity (no 299372). All profits from The Yeovil Literary Prize are used to promote the arts and artistic endeavours in and around Yeovil.

the Bridport Prize

International Creative Writing Competition

CLOSING DATE
31st MAY 2019

Poems | 1st prize £5000
judge **Hollie McNish**

Short Stories | 1st prize £5000
judge **Kirsty Logan**

Flash Fiction | 1st prize £1000
judge **Kirsty Logan**

Novel Award | 1st prize £1000
judge **Naomi Wood**

enter online | www.bridportprize.org.uk

Questions Writing Prize

Short stories, 1,500-2,000 words by Australian writers aged 18-30
Prizes: Aus\$2,000
Free entry
Closing date: 1 May
www.questions.com.au

Remastered Words Short Story Competition

Fantasy short stories, up to 5,000 words
Prizes: £75, £50, £25; audiobook production with royalties
Free entry
Closing date: 1 May
www.remasteredwords.com

Sow's Ear Poetry Review Chapbook Contest

Poetry collections, 22-26 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 1 May
www.sowsearpoetry.org

Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize

Unpublished full-length poetry collections, 50-70 pages
Prizes: \$2,500 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 May
www.kent.edu/wick

The Hal Prize

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 2,000 words; poems, no more than a page
Prizes: Cash prizes and publication
Entry fee: \$5
Closing date: 1 May
<http://thehalprize.com>

Writers Digest Self-Published Book Awards

Fully self-published books in English
Prizes: \$8,000; \$1,000 for best in each of 8 categories
Entry fee: \$125, \$99 before 1 April
Closing date: 1 May
www.writersdigest.com

Shore Scripts Short Film Fund

Short scripts between 3 and 13 pages
Prizes: Production budget of up to \$15,000
Entry fee: \$50
Closing date: 2 May
www.shorescripts.com/shortfilmfund/

I_Shots Awards

For short poetry pamphlets, 16-20 pages, up to 40 lines a page
Prizes: up to two poets will receive 50 copies of their 'poetry shots', published by Templar Poetry, with launch events and opportunity to appear at live Templar Poetry events
Entry fee: £17 (£18 online)
Closing date: 6 May
<http://templarpoeetry.com>

Anthony Cronin International Poetry Award

Poems up to 40 lines
Prizes: €300, €200, €100
Entry fee: €10
Closing date: 4 May
www.wexfordliteraryfestival.com

Colm Tóibín International Short Story Award

Short stories between 1,800 and 2,000 words
Prizes: €700, €500, €300
Entry fee: €10
Closing date: 4 May
www.wexfordliteraryfestival.com

Leapfrog Press Fiction Contest

Book-length fiction, over 22,000 words
Prizes: \$1,150 and publication; \$150 for finalists
Entry fee: \$33
Closing date: 5 May
www.leapfrogpress.com/contest.htm

RTE Radio 1 Short Story Competition

Stories, 1,800-2,000 words, from Irish writers
Prizes: €3,000, €2,000, €1,000, 7x€250
Free entry
Closing date: 10 May
www.rte.ie/writing

Canadian Stories Magazine Contest

Prose up to 3,000 words; up to 3 poems.
Worldwide writers welcome but entries must pertain to Canada
Prizes: 4xCan\$350, \$200, \$100, \$50
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 15 May
www.canadianstories.net

Janet B McCabe Poetry Contest

2 poems, up to 40 lines
Prizes: \$1,500
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 15 May
www.ruminatemagazine.com

Loraine Williams Poetry Prize

Up to three poems, up to ten pages total
Prizes: \$1,500 and publication
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 15 May
<http://thegeorgiareview.com/>

Nick Darke Award

Full-length stage plays
Prizes: £6,000
Free entry
Closing date: 21 May TBC
www.falmouth.ac.uk/nickdarkeaward

Ereash Writers Free Comp

Writing on a theme TBC
Prizes: TBC
Free entry
Closing date: 23 May
<http://ereashwriterscompetition.weebly.com>

Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 3,500 words
Prizes: \$1,500, 2x\$500
Entry fee: \$15 before 1 May, then \$20
Closing date: 15 May
<https://shortstorycompetition.com/>

Lush Triumphant Literary Awards

Short stories, max 3,000 words, creative non-fiction, max 4,000 words; up to five poems, max 15 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication in each category
Entry fee: Can\$30
Closing date: 15 May
<http://subterranean.ca>

Ploughshares Emerging Writer

Fiction and non-fiction, each under 6,000 words; 3-5 pages of poetry
Prizes: \$2,000 in each category, plus publication
Entry fee: \$24
Closing date: 15 May
www.pshares.org/submit

Prophecy Creek award for Speculative Fiction

Unpublished book-length speculative fiction
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$22
Closing date: 15 May
<https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com>

Raymond Carver Short Story Prize

Annual competition for short stories, up to 10,000 words
Prizes: \$1,500, £500, \$250, 2x\$125
Entry fee: \$17
Closing date: 15 May
www.carvezine.com/raymond-carver-contest/

Willowdown Books Cunningham Short Story Competition

Short stories, 1,000-3,000 words
Prizes: \$100
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 May
www.willowdownbooks.com/TC.htm

TulipTree Review New Writers Contest

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 10,000 words; poems, any length
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 23 May
www.tuliptreepub.com/tuliptree-review.html

Bluepencilagency First Novel Prize

The first chapter of an unpublished novel up to 5,000 words
Prizes: £1,250 in prizes, manuscript review, introduction to judge literary agent Nelle Andrew
Entry fee: £20
Closing date: 31 May
www.bluepencilagency.com

International Welsh Poetry Competition

Poems up to 50 lines

Prizes: £500, £250, £100, plus 17 runners-up

Entry fee: £5, PayPal available too

Closing date: 26 May

www.welshpoetry.co.uk

Wigtown Poetry Competition

For poems, up to 40 lines in English, Scots or Scots/Irish Gaelic

Prizes: In 2018: £1,500, £400, Gaelic Prize

£250, Scots Prize £250, 8 £25 runners-up

Entry fee: £6.50, £17 for three, £5 after that

Closing date: 27 May TBC

www.wigtownbookfestival.com/poetrycomp

Peter Hinchcliffe Fiction Award

Short stories by a Canadian citizen

Prizes: Can\$1,000

Entry fee: \$40

Closing date: 28 May

<https://tnq.ca/contests/>

Tillie Olsen Short Story Award

Short stories, up to 5,000 words

Prizes: \$500 and publication

Entry fee: \$15

Closing date: 30 May

<https://thetishmanreview.com/contests/>

1,000 Word Challenge

Themed quarterly competition for stories up to 1,000 words

Prizes: £150, £75, £50

Entry fee: £5

Closing date: 31 May; quarterly

www.1000wordchallenge.com

Antigonish Review Sheldon Currie Fiction Prize

Short stories, max 3,000 words

Prizes: Can\$500, \$300 and \$100; publication

Entry fee: \$30

Closing date: 31 May TBC

www.antigonishreview.com

Bodley Head/FT Essay Prize

Essays up to 3,500 words by writers aged 18-35

Prizes: £1,000, £500, publication

Free entry

Closing date: 31 May TBC

www.bodleyhead.co.uk

Bridport Prize

For short stories (up to 5,000 words), novels (first 8,000 words), poetry (up to 42 lines) and flash fiction (up to 250 words)

Prizes: £5,000, £1,000, £500 and ten £100

highly commendeds for short stories and poetry; £1,000, £500, £250, three £100 highly commendeds for flash fiction; £1,000, £500,

3x£100 for novels, plus editorial guidance

Entry fee: £9 per flash fiction, £10 per poem, £12 per short story

Closing date: 31 May

www.bridportprize.org.uk

CBC Poetry Prize

Poems or poem collections, up to 600 words total, by Canadian citizens or residents

Prizes: Can\$6,000, 4x\$1,000

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 31 May

www.cbc.ca/books/literaryprizes

Frogmore Poetry Prize

For poems, any theme/style, up to 40 lines, for the contest's 33rd year

Prizes: 250 guineas, 75 guineas, 50 guineas, plus subscriptions to *The Frogmore Papers*

Entry fee: £3

Closing date: 31 May

www.frogmorepress.co.uk

Frome Festival Short Story

Short stories, 1,000-2,200 words, any theme

Prizes: £400, £200, £100, extra prizes for local entrants, winning entrants published on the website and may be sent to *Woman's Weekly* and/or Frome FM for consideration

Entry fee: £8

Closing date: 31 May

www.fromeshortstorycompetition.co.uk

Go Gothic Poetry Competition

Poems, 250 words max, in the gothic tradition

Prizes: 30% of entry fees received

Entry fee: £2, £1 each additional

Closing date: 31 May

www.myfanwycook.com/go-gothic-poetry-competition/

Reflex Quarterly Flash Fiction

Stories between 180 and 360 words

Prizes: £1,000, £500, £250

Entry fee: £7

Closing date: 31 May TBC

www.reflexfiction.com

Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition

Poems up to 50 lines

Prizes: £250, £100, £50, £30 x 3 £15 x 3

Entry fee: £4, £7 for two, £9 for three, £11 for four, £12 for five, £16 for seven, £22 for ten

Closing date: 31 May TBC

<http://sentinelquarterly.com>

Yeovil Literary Prize

For novels (opening chapters and synopsis, up to 15,000 words), short stories (max 2,000 words, poems (up to 40 lines), writing without restrictions, Western Gazette best local writer

Prizes: Novel: £1,000, £250, £100; Short story: £500, £200, £100; Poetry: £500, 200, £100; Writing without restrictions: £200, £100, £50; Local prize: £100

Entry fee: Novel: £12; Short story: £7; Poetry: £7 for one, £10 for two, £12 for three; Writing without restrictions: £5

Closing date: 31 May

www.yeovilprize.co.uk

Winner profile

Alex Morrison

won WM's 750-word competition with

The Letter.

Read the full story:

<https://writ.rs/alexmorrison>



She dumped me. Can't believe it. Didn't even do it herself. She sent Hayley Baker over during break. 'You're dumped,' she said. Just that. Hate her. Hate them both.

'What are you reading?' Vicky asks, her eyes on the TV as she lies beside me on the sofa.

'Nothing. Just my diary from...' I look at the cover. '1994.'

'Fun,' she says. I can't tell if she's being sarcastic. 'Any good?'

'Not really. Just teenage angst.'

She'll regret this. When I'm famous and I've got my own car and a pool in my mansion. Then she'll be sorry. Or if I died. Yeah, she'd cry then. Probably.

The pen marks are deep, ripping through in places. A forensic exam might even show tears fell here, hot and angry.

I can't just let this happen. I did nothing wrong. Why am I the one getting dumped? I should do something.

Within the short, tight space of a 750-word story, Alex Morrison takes the reader through a rollercoaster ride of recalled emotion and neatly reconciles past and present. Competition winner *The Letter* is a mini-rom-com whose hero is its narrator, re-reading as an adult the letter he wrote as an inept teenager that caused the story's painful, humiliating (yet, in the context of this story, comical) central episode.

Alex has used the confines of a 750-word story very well: the device of flipping backwards and forwards from the letter that conveys his gauche, passionate teenage experience of love lets the reader see the narrator as the boy he was and the man he is: it reads effortlessly, which shows how well it's been crafted. The reader feels from the start that they're safe in the hands of a writer who is going to entertain them with a funny, touching tale.

The Letter is a love story with a happy ending but getting there takes the narrator, and the reader, through a drama. Alex's skill in *The Letter* is in the way he controls the tension and progression of his story, deftly cutting between his storylines in a way that hooks the reader and means that each new revelation from the past moves the story towards its denouement. **WM**

JUNE

Boulevard Poetry Contest

Groups of three poems by a writer who has not had a book published
Prizes: \$1,000
Entry fee: \$16 each category, includes mag sub
Closing date: 1 Jun
<https://boulevardmagazine.org/poetry-contest/>

Gertrude Stein Award

Short stories, up to 8,000 words
Prizes: \$1,000
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 Jun
<https://moonmilkreview.submittable.com>

London Magazine

All details TBC, novels, poems (40 lines), short stories (4,000 words) last year
Prizes: £3,000 prize fund in 2018
Entry fee: £10/£20 in 2018
Closing date: 1 Jun see website for any info
www.thelondonmagazine.org

Room Creative Non-Fiction Comp

Essays, up to 3,500 words
Prizes: \$500, \$250, \$50 and publication
Entry fee: International entries \$42
Closing date: 1 Jun
<https://roommagazine.com/contests>

Bath Novel Award

The first 5,000 words of a novel, plus synopsis
Prizes: £2,500; 2nd: agent introductions and manuscript feedback; 3rd: Cornerstones course
Entry fee: £25
Closing date: 2 Jun
<http://bathnovelaward.co.uk>

Creative Future Writers' Award

Poetry up to 200 words, short fiction up to 2,000 words, on the theme of 'home' by disadvantaged writers
Prizes: £10,000 in development opportunities
Free entry
Closing date: 2 Jun
www.creativefuture.org.uk/cfwa

Writers Digest Annual Writing

Prose, various lengths 2,000-4,000 words; poetry up to 32 lines
Prizes: \$5,000 overall; \$1,000, \$500, \$250, \$100, \$50, 5x\$25 in each of 9 categories
Entry fee: Stories \$35, poetry \$25; \$30/\$20 before 6 May
Closing date: 3 Jun
www.writersdigest.com

Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting

For full-length (at least an hour) new stage plays written in English, which have not been published or professionally performed
Prizes: £16,000; 2x£8,000.
Free entry
Closing date: 5 Jun
www.writeaplay.co.uk

TLC Pen Factor Writing Competition

Fiction (adult and YA) and memoir, length TBC, open to TLC Writers' Day ticket holders
Prizes: chance to pitch to literary agents and publishers during TLC Writers' Day, other writer development prizes TBC
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 5 Jun TBC
<https://literaryconsultancy.co.uk>

ALCS Award for Education Writing

Traditionally published non-fiction that enhances learning
Prizes: £2,000
Free entry
Closing date: 10 Jun
www.societyofauthors.org

Bath Flash Fiction Award

Thrice-yearly competition for flash fiction up to 300 words
Prizes: £1,000, £300, £100
Entry fee: £9
Closing date: 10 Jun; Oct and Feb TBC
<http://bathflashfictionaward.com>

Booksie First Chapter Novel Competition

First chapter of an unpublished novel, which does not have to be finished
Prizes: \$1,000, 2x\$150
Entry fee: \$7.95
Closing date: 14 Jun
www.booksie.com/contest/booksie-2019-first-chapter-novel-contest-15

Divine Chocolate Poetry Comp

For poems on the theme 'how can chocolate change the world?' from poets aged 7-11, 12-16 and 17+
Prizes: Divine chocolate and goodies
Free entry
Closing date: 14 Jun
www.divinechocolate.com/uk/poetry

Goi Peace International Essay Contest for Young People

Essays of 700 words or fewer in English, German, Spanish, French or Japanese, by writers aged under 25
Prizes: ¥100,000, 2x¥50,000, in each category
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Jun
www.goipeace.or.jp/work/essay-contest/

Segora Short Story and Poetry Competitions

Short stories between 1,500 and 3,000 words, poems up to 50 lines, vignettes up to 300 words, one-act plays
Prizes: £300, £50, £30 for poetry and short story, £100 for vignettes and plays
Entry fee: £5 poems and vignettes, £6 story, £12 play TBC
Closing date: 15 Jun
www.poetryprosenandplays.com

Hummingbird Flash Fiction Prize

Short fiction, up to 1,000 words
Prizes: Can\$300, \$75
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 15 Jun
<http://pulpliterature.com/contests/>

Narrative Prize

Short story, novel excerpt, poem, play, graphic story or literary non-fiction published in *Narrative*
Prize: \$4,000
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Jun
www.narrativemagazine.com/great-stories/narrative-prize

Canterbury Festival Poet of the Year Competition

Poems up to 60 lines
Prizes: £200, £100, £50, £25
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 17 Jun
www.canterburyfestival.co.uk

Omnidawn Publishing Poetry Chapbook Contest

Poetry collections, 20-40 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$18
Closing date: 17 Jun
<http://omnidawn.com>

Eylands International Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 2,500 words, theme TBC
Prizes: A week's holiday for two in Crete
Entry fee: €10 TBC
Closing date: 20 Jun
<https://eylands.gr>

A Midsummer Tale Narrative Writing Contest

Literary fiction and creative non-fiction, 1,000-5,000 words, on a theme TBC
Prizes: \$50, \$15, \$10 Amazon gift cards
Free entry
Closing date: 21 Jun
<http://tclj.toasted-cheese.com>

McLellan Poetry Prize

Poems up to 80 lines
Prizes: First prize of £1,500 TBC
Entry fee: £5, £4 for three or more TBC
Closing date: 21 Jun
www.arranart.com

Queen Mary Wasafiri New Writing Prize

Poetry (up to five poems), fiction and life writing up to 3,000 words
Prizes: £1,000 in each category plus publication in Wasafiri
Entry fee: £6 for one category, £10 for two categories, £15 for three categories
Closing date: 28 Jun
www.wasafiri.org

Wild Words Summer Solstice Writing Competition

1,000 words poetry or prose, theme TBC
Prizes: mentoring session, online publication
Entry fee: £7
Closing date: 21 Jun
www.wildwords.org

VS Pritchett Memorial Prize

Unpublished short stories between 2,000 and 4,000 words
Prizes: £1,000 plus publication
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 28 Jun
www.rslit.org

Crabbe Competition

Poems, up to 50 lines, by Suffolk poets/members of the Suffolk Poetry Society
Prizes: £600, £300, £150, 2 x £75
Entry fee: £3
Closing date: 29 Jun
<http://suffolkpoetrysociety.org.uk>

Aftermath Short Story Contest

Short stories, up to 5,000 words, on environmental or societal cautionary tales
Prizes: \$1,000, \$300, \$100
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.aftermathmag.org

Antigonish Review Blue Heron Poetry Contest

Single or multiple poems, max 150 lines total
Prizes: Can\$500, \$300 and \$100; publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 30 Jun TBC
www.antigonishreview.com

Audio Arcadia's General Fiction Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 5,000 words
Prizes: Anthology publication, royalties
Entry fee: £5.50
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.audioarcadia.com

Berlin Writing Prize

Prose, up to 3,000 words, theme 'The Circus'
Prizes: Month-long writer's residency
Entry fee: €12
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.thereaderberlin.com

Blue Mountain Arts Poetry Card Competition

Biannual competition for greetings card poems
Prizes: \$350, \$200, \$100
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.sps.com/poetry/

British Czech & Slovak Association

Short stories and non-fiction, up to 2,000 words, exploring the links between Britain and the Czech/Slovak Republics at any time. The suggested, but optional, theme for 2019 in '1989'.
Prizes: £400, £150, publication in the British Czech & Slovak Review
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.bcsa.co.uk

British Fantasy Society Short Story Competition

For any kind of fantasy short stories, horror, sf, magic realism etc, up to 5,000 words
Prizes: £100, £50, £20, membership of BFS and publication in BFS Horizons
Entry fee: £5, free for BFS members
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.britishfantasysociety.co.uk

Drue Heinz Literature Prize

Short fiction collections by writers with a record of publication
Prizes: \$15,000
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.upress.pitt.edu/drue-heinz-literature-prize-submission-guidelines/

Winner profile

The thought that she did not exist occurred to her as she rolled out chapatis for dinner. Perhaps that's why she never managed to crawl out of the carcass of this marriage. Of course, she had stayed on for Dipu. She had promised herself that she'd walk out the day Dipu turned eighteen. Then, the deadline got pushed to the day Dipu settled down with a job. Then she figured she'd stay on till he got married. Dipu had crossed all the milestones, including becoming a father himself, but she was still—

'Is dinner ready?'

She did not answer at first. She was a bit slow that way.

'Dinner?' Dilip repeated, voice raised.

'Ten minutes. I—'

Dilip walked out. He came back after a minute and said, 'Switch on the goddamn chimney. The whole house smells of your burnt chapati.'

She did not respond. In the afternoon, he had yelled at her for switching on the chimney and creating a ruckus just to cook rice and dal, especially when he needed some peace and quiet.

He came forward and switched on the chimney. He picked up a steel jug that sloshed with water and flung it to the ground.

She jumped but did not turn around. She gripped the rolling pin tightly and continued to roll out the chapatis.

He pulled the rolling pin from her hands and smashed it on the floor. 'Don't you dare ignore me,' he snarled.

Sumana Khan won WM's Change short story competition with *Eclipse*. Read the full story and judging comments at: <https://writ.rs/sumanakhan>



Sumana Khan's *Eclipse*, the winning story in our Change Short Story Competition, demonstrates the importance of creating character and viewpoint. Sumana's story is literary fiction, and though it's told in a third-person voice, it's such a close third person that the reader identifies completely with the viewpoint character, who isn't named, just as a first-person narrator would not need to introduce themselves. In *Eclipse*, such is Sumana's skill at character creation that we see the world of the story entirely through the lead character's eyes.

It's a bleak enough world: she's trapped in a long, loveless marriage with a man who is introduced to us as impatient and irascible. But the beauty of this humane, compassionate story is that it enables the reader to see, and perhaps understand, in a different way, just as its narrator does, by its end.

The relationship between the narrator and her husband is conveyed to us by way of domestic details: chapatis, broken rolling pins, bickering about her choice of TV. The narrative shift, when it occurs, is also conveyed through a telling domestic detail: the way Dilip used to teach his son via images drawn in flour. From this point, we can no longer see Dilip as a one-dimensional failure of a husband. **WM**



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WIN A Year's Worth of Creative Writing Courses With The Writers' HQ Flash Quarterly Competition!

Writers' HQ wants your words! So send 500 of your very best to our brand new flash fiction competition, running quarterly throughout 2019.

It's free to enter and open internationally, with no restrictions on genre or style.

PLUS win up to 12 months Writers' HQ membership, get access to £1000+ of online creative writing courses and FREE one-day writing retreats.

Deadlines: 31st March / 30th June / 30th September / 31st December

Word limit: 500 words

Entry fee: FREE! (But optional donations to our bursary fund are welcomed.)

Prizes:

- 1st place: 12 months Writers' HQ membership + 3 one-day writing retreats
- 2nd place: 6 months Writers' HQ membership + 3 one-day writing retreats
- 3rd place: 3 months Writers' HQ membership + 3 one-day writing retreats

Find the full guidelines and entry form at

www.writershq.co.uk/whq-flash-quarterly

Earlyworks Press Flash Fiction

Flash fiction, up to 100 words

Prizes: £100, anthology publication

Entry fee: £3, £16 up to 6

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.earlyworkspress.co.uk

Field of Words Short Story Competition

Short stories, 1,000-2,500 words

Prizes: Aus\$500, \$100

Entry fee: Aus\$20

Closing date: 30 Jun

<https://fieldofwords.com.au/writing-competition/>

Flash 500 Competitions

Quarterly competition for flash fiction, up to 500 words

Prizes: £300, £200 and £100

Entry fee: £5, £8 for two

Closing date: 30 Jun, 30 Sep, 31 December

www.flash500.com

Fool for Poetry International Chapbook Competition

Short collection of poetry between 16 and 24 pages

Prizes: €1,000, €500, chapbook publication for both winners plus 25 copies

Entry fee: €25

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.munsterlit.ie

Hastings Literary Festival Short Story Competitions

Short story, poem and flash fiction on the festival theme 'In Other Words' - an exploration of difference and otherness

Prizes: £100, £40 and £25 in each category

Entry fee: £5

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.HastingsLitFest.org

Henshaw Short Story Competition

Quarterly competition for short stories up to 2,000 words

Prizes: £200, £75, £25

Entry fee: £6

Closing date: 30 Jun; 30 Sep, 31 Dec.

www.henshawpress.co.uk

Impress Prize for New Writers

Full-length debuts from unpublished fiction and non-fiction writers. Submit proposal and sample chapter, 6,000 words max total

Prizes: £500 advance and publication

Entry fee: £25

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.impress-books.co.uk

Moth Short Story Prize

Short stories up to 6,000 words, any theme

Prizes: €3,000 and French writing retreat; €1,000

Entry fee: £12

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.themothmagazine.com

North Street Book Prize

Self-published books in various categories

Prizes: \$3,000 overall winner, 6x\$1,000

category winners, \$250 honorable mentions

Entry fee: \$60

Closing date: 30 Jun

<https://winningwriters.com/north>

RW Themed Flash Fiction Prize

Quarterly prize for themed 500-word fiction

Prizes: £200, 2 x £100

Entry fee: £8

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.retreatwest.co.uk

Scribble Quarterly Short Story

Ongoing quarterly competitions for short stories, up to 3,000 words

Prizes: £75, £25, £15 in each issue

Entry fee: £3 (£5 with critique); free for annual subscribers

Closing date: 30 Jun, quarterly

www.parkpublications.co.uk

Sunday Times/PFD Young Writer of the Year Award

Full-length published or self-published fiction, non-fiction or poetry by an author under 35

Prizes: £5,000, 3 x £500

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Jun, TBC

www.societyofauthors.org

Sustainable Societies: Stage Play

Stage plays 60-80 pages touching on ideas of sustainable societies

Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.greenstories.org.uk

Tupelo Broadside Prize

3-5 poems, max 21 lines each

Prizes: \$350 for three winners

Entry fee: \$22

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.tupelopress.org/contests

University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize

Poems, max 50 lines

Prizes: Aus\$15,000, \$5,000, 4x\$50

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/competitions-and-awards/vcpoetryprize

Wells Festival of Literature

Short stories between 1,000 and 2,000 words; poems up to 40 lines; stories for children

Prizes: £750, £300, £200, local prize of £100, in each category

Entry fee: £6

Closing date: 30 Jun

www.wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk

Ultra Short Poem Competition

Poems, no longer than 8 lines, no more than 8 words per line, by Canadian citizens only
Prizes: Can\$100, \$75, \$50, \$25
Entry fee: \$10 for up to 5
Closing date: 30 Jun
www.theontariopoetrysociety.ca

William Van Wert Fiction Award

Short story or novel extracts, up to 25 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$17
Closing date: 30 Jun
<https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com/>

JULY**Cozy Cat Press**

Poems, two pages max, theme 'mystery'
Prizes: \$100, \$50, \$25, plus publication
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Jul
www.cozycatpress.com

Future Visions Award

Short stories, 3,500-7,000 words, presenting a vision of the future
Prizes: \$500
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 1 Jul
<http://theblendinternational.com.au/>

High Sheriff Cheshire Prize for Literature

This year's category is scriptwriting, submit a 500-800-word treatment
Prizes: £2,000 TBC
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Jul
www.chester.ac.uk/literatureprize

Mere Literary Festival Biennial Poetry Competition

Poems up to 40 lines
Prizes: £200, £100, £50, 3 x £15
Entry fee: £4.50, £3.50 for each subsequent
Closing date: 1 Jul
www.merelifest.com

Adelaide Plains Poetry Comp

Poems, up to 60 lines, on theme 'location'
Prizes: Aus\$700 prize fund
Entry fee: \$10, \$5 additional
Closing date: 5 Jul
<http://carolyn-poeticpause.blogspot.com>

HG Wells Short Story Comp

Short stories, 1,500-5,000 words, theme 'time'
Prizes: £1,000 prize for writers under 21, over 21s £250
Entry fee: £10, £5 under 21
Closing date: 8 Jul
<http://hgwellscpetition.com>

Doris Gooderson Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 1,200 words. open theme.
Prizes: £200, £100, £50, possible publication
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 12 Jul
www.wrekinwriters.co.uk

Sustainable Societies: Radio Play Dramas/Comedy Series

Radio plays and comedy series touching on ideas of sustainable societies
Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 12 Jul
www.greenstories.org.uk

Fitzcarraldo Editions Novel Prize

Unpublished novels over 30,000 words
Prizes: £3,000 advance, publication by Fitzcarraldo Editions
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Jul
<https://fitzcarraldoeditions.com>

Peseroff Prize

Up to three poems, any form or content
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 15 Jul
www.breakwaterreview.com/contests

Winner profile

The day we met, he said that he felt like he'd known me for years.

It's a trite sentiment, of course. Everyone says that when they meet someone they fancy the pants off, don't they? But in our case, it was a little more apt than usual.

He didn't know, when I wandered up beside him on Brighton Pier that sunny May Bank Holiday day, that I'd been keeping careful tabs on him for months and waiting for my moment to strike. That sounds creepy, doesn't it? But it wasn't like that.

'I'm Beatrice, but most people call me Bea,' was my opening gambit. I said it without looking at him, just licked my ice cream and looked out at the ocean. We all have Shakespearean names – it's my Developer's little joke. I think he likes to think of himself as a playwright, creating stories for us all to play out. I think maybe I'll be Helena for a while next time, if there is a next time. But I digress.

He told me his name was Jonathan. 'Not Jon. Not ever.' I did not, of course, tell him that I already knew that. I didn't flirt, but I definitely led the conversation. I don't think he really wanted to talk to me, if his shrugs and monosyllabic answers were anything to go by. Some men just don't know what's good for them, do they? But he didn't tell me to clear off or worse, so I stayed.

I asked him where he was from, if he lived locally. It had been a long time since I'd last done this, but I still

Jess Amy Dixon won WM's Speculative Fiction short story competition with *Reboot*.

Read the full story and judging comments at:

<https://writ.rs/jessamydixon>

Judges' comments:

Jess Amy Dixon's *Reboot*, the winner in our competition for short speculative fiction, takes a storyline about very human circumstances – love, grief and loss – and adds a yearning possibility: what if the dead wife could in some form be returned to her grieving husband? Speculative fiction is all about 'what if?' and *Reboot* is an excellent example of a plausible scenario that interrogates what could happen if a wholly unfamiliar element were added to an otherwise recognisably familiar set-up.

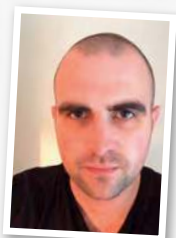
Jess Amy's story paints a very credible picture of a world that closely resembles ours before she drip feeds, via her first-person narrator Beatrice, the information that tells the reader that there are additional, unexpected components to this story, which initially appears to be about an encounter between a man and a woman, who has in some way pre-planned her meeting with Jonathan. The reader is set up for a reveal that will let them know why the woman is tracking this particular man. The sci-fi element is already suggested in the title, *Reboot*, which implies that technology will have a part to play in the unfolding storyline. What makes Jess Amy's story stand out is that an unexpected element is *Reboot* being such a touching love story. **WM**



Winner profile

David Woodfine

won WM's Humour short story competition with *An Unhappy Medium*: <https://writ.rs/davidwoodfine>



Sarah watched the man storm out of the booth, the drama slightly undermined by his getting briefly but comprehensively entangled in the beaded curtain. Freeing himself, he called her something ungentelemanly and then disappeared into the misty rain that had been smothering the seafront for most of the day.


Sarah sat back in her chair and sighed, asking herself, not for the first time that week, why this was so hard. As the guttering candles cast greasy yellow smears across her reflection in the crystal ball on the table, she wondered whether, overdraft or no overdraft, the new job was worth it.

'Knock knock!'

Rose came in through the curtain, bringing with her a blast of cold, salty air. Sarah's employer was a small woman of indeterminate age with a spray of dark hair and so elaborately festooned with charms, medallions and trinkets that she jingled like a pocketful of change. She was from Essex, and sounded like it, except when she was with a customer. With customers she affected a Hammer Horror, somewhere-east-of-the-Urals accent.

Judges' comments:

In David Woodfine's *An Unhappy Medium*, the winner in our competition for humorous short stories, comedy puts things to rights. It's a funny story, of course, but more than that, it demonstrates beautifully how humour can skewer an injustice (in this case exploiting people for financial gain) and restore a balance. David does it simply and confidently: in *An Unhappy Medium*, Rose (fraudulent, bullying) is selling lies and Sarah (decent, truthful) is not having it. In the end, Rose neatly gets her comeuppance and in the process the reader gets to participate, vicariously, in a small victory for decency.

All this comes about because David, a WM repeat winner, is well in command of what's required to tell a story well. 

Ledbury Poetry Festival Poetry Competition

Poetry up to 40 lines

Prizes: £1,000 and a week at Ty Newydd

Entry fee: TBC

Closing date: 18 Jul

www.poetry-festival.co.uk

KSP Little Black Dress Spooky Story Competition

Short stories, up to 1,500 words (500 for youths) on theme 'change'

Prizes: Aus\$100, \$50; \$100, 2x\$25 for youths

Free entry

Closing date: 19 Jul

www.kspwriterscentre.com/spooky-story-competition

Beverly Prize for Literature

Original manuscript of fiction, non-fiction, criticism or poetry

Prizes: £500 and publication

Entry fee: £20

Closing date: 21 Jul

<http://store.eyewearpublishing.com>

Brentwood Writers' Circle 100 Words Competition

Exactly 100 words, theme '100 years ahead'

Prizes: £50, £30, £20

Entry fee: £3

Closing date: 30 Jul

www.brentwoodwriterscircle.org

Hawk Mountain Short Story Collection Award

Unpublished short story collections

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$22

Closing date: 30 Jul

<http://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com>

Betjeman Poetry Prize

Poems on the theme of 'place' by poets aged 10-13 on 31 July

Prizes: £500 for the winner, £5,000 for their school's English department, 3xEurostar tickets to Paris, Brussels or Lille; £50 high commended

Free entry

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.betjemanpoetrycompetition.com

Foyle Young Poets of the Year

Poetry from writers aged 11-17

Prizes: Publication in an anthology, mentoring, Arvon writing residency

Free entry

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.foyleyoungpoets.org

Lune Spark Young Writers

Short stories, up to 1,500 words, by writers aged 10-13 or 13-16

Prizes: \$500, \$250, \$100

Entry fee: \$15

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.lunespark.com

Haunted Waters Press Open

Fiction, max 10,000 words

Prizes: \$250 and publication

Entry fee: \$10

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.hauntedwaterspress.com

HISSAC Annual Open Short Story

Short stories up to 2,000 words, flash fiction up to 500 words. No connection to Scotland is needed either by theme or entrant.

Prizes: £200, £75 and £50 in both categories

Entry fee: £5, £12 for three, £18 for five

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.hissac.co.uk

Norwich Writers' Circle Olga Sinclair Open Short Story Comp

Short stories up to 2,000 words on the theme of 'spooks'

Prizes: £400, £250 and £100

Entry fee: £8

Closing date: 31 Jul

<http://norwichwriters.wordpress.com>

Prism Creative Non-Fiction Competition

Creative non-fiction, max 6,000 words

Prizes: Can\$1,500, \$600, \$400

Entry fee: International entries \$45

Closing date: 31 Jul

<http://prismmagazine.ca/contests/>

Scribble Annual Article Comp

Articles, up to 1,500 words on the theme 'My Writing Day'

Prizes: £50, £25, £15, publication in *Scribble*

Entry fee: £3

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.parkpublications.co.uk

Seán Ó Faoláin Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 3,000 words

Prizes: €2,000, week-long residency at Aman Cara Writers' and Artists' Retreat, €500, 4x€250

Entry fee: €18

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.munsterlit.ie

To Hull and Back Humorous Writing Competition

Funny stories up to 4,000 words

Prizes: £1,000, £200, £100, publication

Entry fee: £11, £18 for 2, £22 for 3, before 30 April; thereafter £13, £21 and £26

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.christopherfielden.com

Westgate Literary Festival Short Story Competitions

Short stories, 1,500-5,000 words; four kids' categories, all with theme 'Westgate on Sea'

Prizes: Cash prize in adult category

Entry fee: £10

Closing date: 31 Jul

www.westgatelitfest.co.uk

Winchester Poetry Prize**Poems up to 40 lines****Prizes:** £1,000, £500, £250, £200 for a Hampshire-based poet**Entry fee:** £5, £4 for subsequent entries**Closing date:** 31 Jul**www.winchesterpoetryfestival.org****Writers Bureau Poetry Competition****Poetry up to 40 lines****Prizes:** £200 plus Writers Bureau course; £100, £50**Entry fee:** £5**Closing date:** 31 Jul**www.wbcompetition.com****AUGUST****Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature****Book-length literature (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry) concerned with the mountain environment****Prizes:** £3,000**Free entry****Closing date:** 1 Aug**www.boardmantasker.com****Constance Rooke Creative Non-Fiction Award****Creative non-fiction, 2,000-3,000 words****Prizes:** Can\$1,000**Entry fee:** International entries \$45**Closing date:** 1 Aug**www.malahatreview.ca****TS Eliot Prize****A published book of poetry****Prizes:** £25,000, 10x£1,500**Entry fee:** by publishers**Closing date:** TBC, 3 Aug in 2018**http://tseliot.com/prize****Costa Short Story Award****Short stories, up to 4,000 words****Prizes:** £3,500, £1,000, £500**Free entry****Closing date:** TBC, 5 Aug in 2018**www.costabookawards.com****Buzzwords Open Poetry Comp****Poems up to 70 lines****Prizes:** £600, £300, 5 x £50, Gloucestershire Prize of £200**Entry fee:** £4, £10 for 3 (£4.35, £11 online)**Closing date:** TBC, 15 Aug in 2018**www.buzzwordspetry.blogspot.co.uk****Iowa Prize for literary non-fiction****Literary non-fiction, 40,000-90,000 words****Prizes:** Publication by University of Iowa Press under a standard contract**Entry fee:** \$10**Closing date:** 15 Aug**www.uiopress.uiowa.edu****Over The Edge New Writer of The Year****Poetry (three poems of up to 40 lines or one of 100 lines); short stories, up to 3,000 words****Prizes:** €300 for winning poet and short story writer, plus €400 for overall winner.

publication and readings at Over the Edge

Entry fee: €10, €7.50 for each of multiples**Closing date:** TBC, 8 Aug in 2018**www.overttheedgeeliteraryevents.blogspot.com****Room Poetry Contest****Up to 3 poems, max 150 lines total****Prizes:** \$500, \$250, \$50 and publication**Entry fee:** International entries \$42**Closing date:** 15 Aug**https://roommagazine.com/contests****SCPSW Annual Children's Short Story Competition****Short stories up to 1,000 words by SCPSW members for children****Prizes:** £50, £25**Free entry****Closing date:** 15 Aug**www.scpw.co.uk****Lake Merritt Poetry Book Contest****Poetry collections by new or emerging poets, 40-120 pages****Prizes:** \$3,000 and publication**Entry fee:** \$27**Closing date:** 19 Aug**http://omnidawn.com****Elyne Mitchell Writing Award****Fiction or non-fiction, up to 2,500 words, on the Australasian rural experience****Prizes:** Aus\$1,000, \$500**Entry fee:** \$15**Closing date:** 22 Aug**www.elynemitchell.com.au/****Val Wood Prize****Short stories on a theme TBC****Prizes:** £100, £50, 2 x £25, website publication**Free entry****Closing date:** 24 Aug**www.valeriewood.co.uk****Biographers' Club Tony Lothian Prize****An uncommissioned biography by a first-time biographer. Submit a 20-page proposal with synopsis, sample chapter, CV, sources and a note on the market for the book.****Prize:** £2,000**Entry fee:** £15**Closing date:** 31 Aug**www.biographersclub.co.uk****Exeter Flash Competition****Flash fiction up to 750 words****Prizes:** £200, £100, £50**Entry fee:** £6**Closing date:** 31 Aug**www.creativewritingmatters.co.uk****Thomas Paine Award****Unpublished book-length political or social activist writing****Prizes:** \$1,000 and publication**Entry fee:** \$22**Closing date:** 30 Aug**https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com****Torbay Festival of Poetry****Poems up to 50 lines****Prizes:** Last year, £700, £400, £200, plus festival tickets**Entry fee:** £5, £20 for five**Closing date:** 31 Aug TBC**www.torbaypoetryfestival.co.uk****Aesthetica Creative Writing****Short stories up to 2,000 words, poetry up to 40 lines. Any theme, form or style****Prizes:** £1,000 for winners in each category, publication, plus various extra prizes**Entry fee:** £12, poetry; £18, short fiction**Closing date:** 31 Aug**www.aestheticmagazine.com****Diana Woods Memorial Award in Creative Non-fiction****Essays, up to 5,000 words; biannual****Prizes:** \$250 plus publication in Lunch Ticket**Free entry****Closing date:** 31 Aug (and 28 Feb)**https://lunchticket.org/contests/the-diana-woods-memorial-award/****Exeter Story Prize****Short stories, any theme, up to 10,000 words****Prizes:** £500, £150, £100**Entry fee:** £12**Closing date:** 31 Aug**www.creativewritingmatters.co.uk****Gabo Prize for Literature in Translation****For translations of poetry or prose; biannual****Prizes:** \$200 plus publication in Lunch Ticket**Free entry****Closing date:** 31 Aug (and 28 Feb)**https://lunchticket.org/contests/gabo-prize-literature-translation-multi-lingual-texts/****New Voices Award****Children's picture book manuscripts by US writers of colour and indigenous writers****Prizes:** \$2,000 plus publishing contract; \$1,000**Free entry****Closing date:** 31 Aug**www.leeandlow.com/writers-illustrators/new-voices-award****Not So Normal Narrators 2019****Short stories told through underrepresented and unusual teen voices****Prizes:** £200, £100, £50, anthology

publication by Odd Voice Out

Entry fee: TBC**Closing date:** 31 Aug**http://oddvoiceout.com/**

Blue Mesa Review Summer Comp

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 6,000 words;
up to 3 poems
Prizes: \$500 in each category
Entry fee: \$12
Closing date: 31 Aug TBC
<http://bmr.unm.edu/contest/>

Preservation Foundation Unpublished Writers Contests

Non-fiction, 1,000-10,000 words, in four
categories TBA
Prizes: \$200, \$100, 3x\$50
Free entry
Closing date: 31 Aug
www.storyhouse.org/contest2018.html

Scarlet Stiletto Awards

Crime and mystery short stories, up to 5,000
words, by Australian women
Prizes: Aus\$9,760 prize fund
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 31 Aug TBC
www.sistersincrime.org.au/the-scarlet-stiletto-awards/

Shore Scripts Screenwriting

Feature, TV pilot and short film scripts
Prizes: Prizes totalling \$20,000
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 31 Aug TBC
www.shorescripts.com

Sustainable Societies: Novel

Full length novels touching on ideas of
sustainable societies
Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 31 Aug
www.greenstories.org.uk

SEPTEMBER

Mslexia and PBS Women's Poetry and Poetry Pamphlet Competition

Poetry and poetry pamphlets
Prizes: TBC
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 1 Sep TBC
www.mslexia.co.uk

Retreat West Novel Prize

Unpublished novels
Prizes: Retreat West publishing contract and
£500 advance, MS critique and editorial report
Entry fee: £15
Closing date: 1 Sep
www.retreatwest.co.uk

Transitions Abroad

Essays or guides, 1,200-3,000 words on
living, moving or working abroad
Prizes: \$500, \$150, \$100; \$50 for all finalists
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Sep
www.transitionsabroad.com/information/writers/expatriate_writing_contest.shtml

Walrus Poetry Prize

Single poems, TBC
Prizes: Can\$4,000, \$1,000 TBC
Entry fee:
Closing date: 1 Sep TBC
<http://thewalrus.ca>

Michael Marks Award for Poetry Pamphlets and the Michael Marks Poetry Publishers Award

For poetry pamphlets up to 36 pages, and
for the publishers of poetry pamphlets
Prizes: £5,000 for each award
Free entry
Closing date: TBC, 3 Sep in 2018
www.wordsworth.org.uk/poetrypamphlets.html

Diana Brebner Prize

Best poem by a resident of Canada's National
Capital Region
Prizes: Can\$500
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 4 Sep
<http://arcpoetry.ca/contests-page/>

Sustainable Societies: Full-length Film Screenplays

Film screenplays touching on ideas of
sustainable living
Prizes: £500, £200, £100, 3 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 9 Sep TBC
www.greenstories.org.uk

Wellcome Book Prize

The best literature (fiction or non-fiction)
with a medical or biomedical theme
published in 2018
Prizes: £30,000
Free entry
Closing date: 9 Sep TBC
www.wellcomebookprize.org

East London Writeidea Prize

Short stories by unpublished writers
Prizes: £300, 4 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 13 Sep TBC
www.ideastore.co.uk/writeidea

Hektoen International Summer Essay Competition

Articles, up to 1,600 words, on a medical
humanities theme TBC
Prizes: \$2,500 plus publication; \$800
Entry fee:
Closing date: 14 Sep TBC
<https://hekint.org/2018/05/30/summer-essay-contest/>

New Voices Competition

First novel page and synopsis by a first-timer
Prizes: mentoring package worth £550
Entry fee: £10
Closing date: 14 Sep
www.adventuresinfiction.co.uk

Ginkgo Prize for Ecopoetry

Poems up to 54 lines on ecological themes
Prizes: £5,000, £2,000, £1,000
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 15 Sep
www.resurgenceprize.org

London Short Story Prize

Short stories up to 5,000 words by writers
with London postcodes
Prizes: £1,000
Entry fee: £6
Closing date: 17 Sep TBC
www.spreadtheword.org.uk

Hammond House Publishing Competitions 2019

Short stories between 2,000 and 7,000
words, poems up to 40 lines and scripts
(length TBC) on a theme TBC
Prizes: Short stories £500; poems £100; scripts
recorded production
Entry fee: £10
Closing date: 20 Sep
www.hammondhousepublishing.com

Manchester Prize

Short stories, up to 2,500 words; portfolio of
3-5 poems, max 120 lines each
Prizes: £10,000 in each category
Entry fee: £17.50
Closing date: 20 Sep
www2.mmu.ac.uk/writingcompetition/

Surrey International Writers' Conference

Short stories, 2,500-5,000 words
Prizes: Can\$1,000, \$150
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 21 Sep
www.siwc.ca/writing-contest/

Ninevoices Short Story Comp

Short stories 1,200-1,500 words on the
theme of summer by writers who have not
earned more than £300 from their writing
Prizes: £250, £50
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 23 Sep
<https://ninevoices.wordpress.com/>

Bedford International Writing Competition

Short stories up to 3,000 words, poems up
to 40 lines, on any theme
Prizes: £300, £150, £100, special Bedford
Prizes £100 in each category
Entry fee: £6, £12 for three
Closing date: 30 Sep TBC
www.bedfordwritingcompetition.co.uk

Imison Award

Original radio plays by writers new to radio
Prizes: £2,000
Entry fee: £30
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.societyofauthors.org/imison-award

KSP Writers Centre Short Fiction Competition

Short stories, up to 2,500 words, by Australian residents or citizens
Prizes: Aus\$300, \$150; \$100, \$50 for youths
Entry fee: \$10
Closing date: 27 Sep
www.kspwriterscentre.com/short-fiction-competition

Bracken Bower Prize

Best proposal for a business book from a writer under 35
Prizes: £15,000
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Sep, TBC
www.ft.com

Caterpillar Story for Children Prize

Short stories up to 2,000 words for children aged 7-11
Prizes: £1,000
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.thecterpillarmagazine.com

Galley Beggar Press Short Story Prize

Short stories up to 6,000 words
Prizes: £1,000 or a year's editorial support, £150 for shortlisted authors, £50 bookshop vouchers and four GBP titles for longlisted
Entry fee: £10
Closing date: 30 Sep
<http://galleybeggar.co.uk>

Iowa Short Fiction Award

Short story collections of at least 150 pages by authors who have not had a book published
Prizes: Publication by University of Iowa Press under a standard contract
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.uiowa.edu

Miller Williams Poetry Prize

Poetry manuscripts, 60-90 pages
Prizes: \$5,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$28
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.uapress.com/prizes/

Mslexia Women's Fiction Awards

In 2019: Short story, flash fiction, novel, monologue
Prizes: £10,000+ prize pot
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.mslexia.co.uk

Salopian Poetry Society's annual open poetry competition

Poetry, any length
Prizes: TBC
Entry fee: £4, £12 for four, £15 for six
Closing date: 30 Sep
thesalopianpoetrysociety.webeden.co.uk

Tinniswood Award

Original radio drama scripts first broadcast or made available online between 1 October 2017 and 31 October 2018
Prizes: £2,000
Entry fee: £30
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.societyofauthors.org/tinniswood-award

Tom Howard/Margaret Reid Poetry Contest

Poems in two styles: open and traditionally rhymed. Up to 250 lines.
Prizes: \$2,000 in each category, 10x\$100
Entry fee: \$12
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.winningwriters.com/tompoetry

World Around Us Chapbook Anthology Contest

Poems, no longer than 36 lines
Prizes: Can\$100, \$75, \$50, \$25x2
Entry fee: \$5, 3 for \$10
Closing date: 30 Sep
www.theontariopoetrysociety.ca

OCTOBER

Mighty River Short Story Contest

Stories, max 30 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 Oct
www.semopress.com/events/

Moon City Short Fiction Award

Short fiction collections, 30,000-65,000 words
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 1 Oct
<http://moon-city-press.com/fiction-contest/>

Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival

Plays, poetry, fiction and flash, all details TBC
Prizes: 2x\$1,500, \$1,000, \$500 TBC
Entry fee: \$10-\$25
Closing date: 1 Oct TBC
<http://tennesseewilliams.net/contests/>

Wilde Heame Flash Fiction Contest

Stories, up to 500 words
Prizes: \$500 and publication
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 1 Oct
www.semopress.com/events/

Zoetrope All-Story Short Fiction Competition

Short stories, 1,000-5,000 words
Prizes: \$1,000, \$500, \$250 and publication
Entry fee: \$15
Closing date: 1 Oct
www.all-story.com/contests/

Winner profile

Jodie Carpenter

won WM's Epistolary short story competition with *Skye's Scribbles*:
<https://writ.rs/jodiecarpenter>



@skyesscribbles 7h
Omg, my life seriously. It's literally a joke.
@skyesscribbles 7h
I mean, get this. It's Friday and I'm staying in while my MOM is going pole dancing.
@skyesscribbles 7h
That's right. POLE dancing. My MOM. Those two things definitely don't belong in the same sentence. #awkward #pleasenosparemybrain
@skyesscribbles 7h
I don't know if she's a legend or an embarrassment??
@skyesscribbles 7h
AND she's got a date tonight with Mr Pole Dancing instructor. What does he see in her?
@skyesscribbles 7h
In answer to my last two questions: 1) an embarrassment 2) she's just come down the stairs in a turquoise crop top and leopard-print leggings. So so gross *throws up*

Judges' comments:

An epistolary story being one that is told through written communication, it makes perfect sense that a 21st century epistolary tale would unfold through Twitter – which is what happens in Jodie Carpenter's winning story *Skye's Scribbles*.

Skye's voice feels authentically teenage and so does the ease with which she uses social media to provide a running commentary on events as they unfold. The traditional Twitter 160-character limit allows Skye to convey the immediacy of her changing circumstances, which butterfly convincingly between her everyday activities and the encroaching sense that something is not right.

The set-up is great, and so is the pace: Jodie builds up her narrative at just the right speed, creating a vivid sense of Skye and her life at each given moment, whether it's rolling her eyes in disgust at her embarrassing mother, getting to grips with having to cook her own tea or listening to music. **WM**

Winner profile

Amanda Marples

won WM's First Line short story competition with

Waiting Room:

<https://writ.rs/amandamarples>



“No. Stop. Put it back.”
Nothing.
“Jake!” Still, nothing.

He's not even hearing me.

He's going to knock something off and she's just sitting there looking at me. She hates me. What does she expect me to do? Let him wreck everything? He's got to learn. He can't be doing things like this when he's at work. If he ever gets a job. At this rate who knows.

I can't keep doing this.

I can't look at him. I can't lose it in here. What if I lose it and they ring social services? Breathe. Focus on something. Not the woman over there with the boy. Headphones on, same as Jake but much older. Late twenties? Probably not got a job. Probably not got a girlfriend. Probably living at home with his mother, still picking his clothes out for him. How does she do it? Is she just sleepwalking? Is this who we are now?

I can't do this.

Judges' comments:

Waiting Room, Amanda Marples' winning entry in our First Line Short Story Competition, tackles a sensitive subject – the experience of parenting a child potentially on the autism spectrum – with insight and sensitivity. But this in itself is not why her story won this competition: if anything, a story that generates sympathy and compassion because of its subject matter has to work even harder to establish its creative writing credentials.

Amanda succeeds wonderfully in *Waiting Room*. Told through the perspectives of four people, it builds not just into a tentatively hopeful resolution but into a greater insight into what it might feel like to be in the position of four people whose lives are altered by the child's condition. **WM**

Virginia Prize for Fiction

For unpublished novels

Prizes: £1,000 and development and publication of the winning novel

Entry fee: TBC

Closing date: 1 Oct

<http://aurorametro.com>

Sustainable Societies: Short Film

Short films (between 3 and 20 minutes)

touching on ideas of sustainable living

Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50

Free entry

Closing date: 10 Oct TBC

www.greenstories.org.uk

Observer/Jonathan Cape/Comica Graphic Short Story Prize

Graphic short stories

Prizes: £1,000 plus publication; £250 plus online publication

Free entry

Closing date: 14 Oct TBC

www.penguinrandomhouse.co.uk/publishers/vintage/jonathan-cape/

Event non-fiction contest

Creative non-fiction, max 5,000 words

Prizes: Can\$1,500, \$1,000, \$500; publication

Entry fee: \$34.95

Closing date: 15 Oct TBC

www.eventmagazine.ca/contest-nf/

Omnidawn Open

Poetry collections, 40-120 pages

Prizes: \$3,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$27

Closing date: 15 Oct

<http://omnidawn.com>

Eylands Book Awards

Published and unpublished books

Prizes: Published books, a five-day holiday in Athens; unpublished books, publication from Strange Days Books

Entry fee: \$30

Closing date: 20 Oct

www.eylands.gr

Ibiza Quills Black and White Compilation Competition

Short stories, up to 2,500 words, poems up to 25 lines, connected to Ibiza

Prizes: €100, €50 and €25 in each category

Entry fee: €12

Closing date: 21 Oct

<https://ibizaquills.com/competition-2/>

Troubadour International Poetry Prize

Poems, up to 45 lines

Prizes: £2,000, £1,000, £500, plus smaller prizes

Entry fee: £6, €7, \$8 for the first poem, £4, €5, \$6 for any subsequent poems

Closing date: 21 Oct

www.coffeehousepoetry.org

Raven Short Story Contest

Fiction, 250-2,500 words

Prizes: Can\$300

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 15 Oct

<http://pulpfiction.com/contests/>

Omnidawn Fabulist Fiction Chapbook Contest

Single fantastical or magic realist stories, or collections, totalling 5,000-12,000 words

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$18

Closing date: 22 Oct

<http://omnidawn.com>

TulipTree Review Genre Contest

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 10,000 words, any genre

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 23 Oct

www.tuliptreepub.com/tuliptree-review.html

Dinesh Allirajah Prize for Short Fiction

Short fiction on a theme TBC

Prizes: £500 and publication by Comma Press

Free entry

Closing date: 25 Oct

<http://commapress.co.uk/resources/prizes/>

RW Flash Fiction Prize

Short fiction up to 500 words

Prizes: £350, £200, £100, £15

Entry fee: £8

Closing date: 27 Oct

www.retreatwest.co.uk

Poetry Society National Poetry Competition

For poems, up to 40 lines

Prizes: £5,000, £2,000, £1,000, 7x£200

Entry fee: £6.50, £3.50 each additional

Closing date: 31 Oct TBC

www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/competitions/npc/

Cinnamon Pencil Mentoring Competition

10 poems, two short stories or the first 10,000 words of a novel

Prizes: A free place on the Cinnamon Pencil mentoring scheme

Entry fee: £12

Closing date: 30 Oct

www.cinnamonpress.com

Plough Prize

TBC. Last year: open category, poems up to 40 lines; the Ronald Duncan Short Poem Competition, poems up to 10 lines

Prizes: TBC. £1,000, £500, £250 in each category

Entry fee: £5

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.theploughprize.co.uk

RW Short Story Prize

Short stories, 1,500-5,000 words

Prizes: £400, £250, £150, £20 shortlisted

Entry fee: £10

Closing date: 27 Oct

www.retreatwest.co.uk**Momaya Poetry Competition**

Poems on the theme of 'masks'

Prizes: £110, £55, £25, and publication

Entry fee: £7

Closing date: 30 Oct

<http://momayapress.com/>**Benjamin Franklin House Literary Prize**

Fiction and non-fiction interpretations, 1,000-1,500 words, by young writers aged 18-25, of a Benjamin Franklin quote yet to be announced

Prizes: £750, £500, web publication

Free entry

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org**Blue Light Books Prize**

Full-length poetry manuscripts, 48-75 pages

Prizes: \$2,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 31 Oct

<https://indianareview.org/prizes/blue-light-books/>**Cannon Poets Sonnet or Not**

For 14-line poems that in some way reflect the sonnet form, or not

Prizes: £500, £250, £150, up to ten £10

Entry fee: £5, subsequent entries £2.50

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.cannonpoets.org.uk**CBC Short Story Prize**

Short stories, up to 2,500 words, by

Canadian citizens or residents

Prizes: Can\$6,000, 4x\$1,000

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.cbc.ca/books/literaryprizes**Charles Causley Poetry Comp**

Unpublished poems up to 40 lines, any subject

Prizes: £2,000 and writing residency at Cyprus Well, £250, £100, 5 x £30

Entry fee: £7, £4 for each subsequent entry

Closing date: 31 Oct

<http://thecharlescausleypoetrycompetition.wordpress.com>**Earlyworks Press Short Story**

Short stories, up to 8,000 words

Prizes: £200, anthology publication

Entry fee: £5 up to 4,000 words, £10 if 4,000-8,000 words

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.earlyworkspress.co.uk**Eric Gregory Trust Fund Awards**

For a published or unpublished volume of no more than 30 poems by a UK author under the age of 30 on 31 March 2019

Prizes: A share of up to £24,000

Free entry

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.societyofauthors.org**Flash 500 Novel Opening Chapter & Synopsis Competition**

For an opening chapter no longer than 3,000 words, plus synopsis

Prizes: £500, £200

Entry fee: £10

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.flash500.com**McKitterick Prize**

For the best first novel by an author over the age of 40 on 31 December

Prizes: £4,000

Free entry

Closing date: 31 Oct

www.societyofauthors.org**Prism Pacific Spirit Poetry Prize**

Up to three poems, max 100 lines each

Prizes: Can\$1,500, \$600, \$400

Entry fee: International entries \$45

Closing date: 31 Oct TBC

<http://prismmagazine.ca/contests/>

WOMEN'S FICTION AWARDS 2019
 Four competitions One deadline A career-changing opportunity

mslexia
 DEADLINE
 30 SEPTEMBER 2019

The premier women's writing magazine is launching four new fiction competitions in 2019 with a prize pot of over £10,000. With word limits from 300 to over 50,000, there's a category for every kind of writing.

Full submission details will be published in the June 2019 edition of Mslexia and posted on www.mslexia.co.uk

**NOVEL
 SHORT STORY
 MONOLOGUE
 FLASH FICTION**

www.mslexia.co.uk competitions@mslexia.co.uk 0191 204 8860

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Southport Writers' Circle International Short Story Competition

For short stories, up to 2,000 words
Prizes: £150, £80, £30
Entry fee: £3 or £10 for four
Closing date: 31 Oct
www.swconline.co.uk

Southword Fiction Chapbook Competition

Novella, short story collection, collection of flash fiction or a mixture of stories and flash
Prizes: Two winners (Irish and international) will have their chapbook published with €250 advance and 20 complimentary copies
Entry fee: €25
Closing date: 31 Oct TBC
www.munsterlit.ie

Sunken Garden Chapbook Poetry Prize

Chapbook-length poetry manuscripts (20-36 pages advised)
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 31 Oct
www.tupelopress.org/contests

Tom Gallon Trust Awards

Short stories, up to 5,000 words, by authors who have had at least one story accepted for publication
Prizes: £1,000
Free entry
Closing date: 31 Oct
www.societyofauthors.org

Young Walter Scott Prize

Historical fiction, 800-2,000 words, by writers aged 11-15 or 16-19
Prizes: £500 travel grant in each category
Free entry
Closing date: 31 Oct TBC
www.walterscottprize.co.uk/young-walter-scott-prize/

NOVEMBER

Commonwealth Short Story Prize

Original, unpublished short stories, 2,000-5,000 words, by writers from Commonwealth countries in Africa, Asia, Canada and Europe, the Caribbean and Pacific
Prizes: £2,500 for winner from each region, £5,000 for overall winner
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Nov TBC
www.commonwealthwriters.org

Edwin Markham Prize for Poetry

Up to 5 poems
Prize: \$1,000
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.reedmag.org

Alice James Award

Unpublished poetry collections by US poets
Prizes: \$2,000, publication, plus \$1,000 to speak at Maine University
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.alicejamesbooks.org

Caledonia Novel Award

The first 20 pages plus 200-word synopsis of a novel by an unpublished writer
Prizes: £1,500, trophy
Entry fee: £25
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.caledonianovelaward.com

Gabriele Rico Challenge for Fiction

Non-fiction, up to 5,000 words
Prizes: \$1,333
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.reedmag.org

John Steinbeck Award for Fiction

Short stories, up to 5,000 words
Prizes: \$1,000
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.reedmag.org

Malahat Review Open Season Awards

Fiction or creative non-fiction, up to 2,500 words; up to 3 poems, up to 100 lines each
Prizes: Can\$2,000 and publication in each category
Entry fee: International entries \$45
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.malahatreview.ca

New Guard Contests

Fiction, up to 5,000 words; poetry, details TBC
Prizes: \$1,500
Entry fee: \$22
Closing date: 1 Nov TBC
www.newguardreview.com/tng-contests/

Sow's Ear Poetry Review Contest

Up to five poems
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.sowsearpottery.org

Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize

Unpublished poetry collections, over 48 pages
Prizes: \$3,000 plus publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Nov TBC
<http://pleiadespress.org>

VanderMey Nonfiction Prize

Non-fiction, up to 5,500 words
Prizes: \$1,500
Entry fee: \$20
Closing date: 15 Nov
www.ruminatemagazine.com

Room Short Forms Contest

Two prose poems, flash fiction or creative non-fiction, up to 500 words
Prizes: 2xCan\$500, \$50, and publication
Entry fee: International entries \$42
Closing date: 1 Nov
[https://roommagazine.com/contests](http://roommagazine.com/contests)

Scribble Annual Short Story Comp

Stories up to 3,000 words on the theme of 'deception'
Prizes: £100, £50, £25, publication in *Scribble*
Entry fee: £4
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.parkpublications.co.uk

Walt Whitman Award

Book-length poetry manuscripts, 48 pages or more, by US residents
Prizes: \$5,000 plus publication
Entry fee: \$35
Closing date: 1 Nov
www.poets.org/academy-american-poets/prizes/walt-whitman-award

Sustainable Societies: TV/Netflix 6-part Series

TV/Netflix series touching on ideas of sustainable living
Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 11 Nov TBC
www.greenstories.org.uk

Carvezine Prose and Poetry Contest

Fiction and non-fiction, up to 10,000 words; single poems any length
Prizes: \$1,000
Entry fee: \$17
Closing date: 15 Nov
www.carvezine.com

Robert C Jones Short Prose Book Contest

A prose manuscript of more than 60 pages
Prizes: \$2,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$25
Closing date: 15 Nov TBC
<http://pleiadespress.org>

The Queen's Knickers Award

Illustrated book for children aged 0-7 published in the last year
Prizes: £5,000
Free entry
Closing date: 15 Nov
www.societyofauthors.org

Nilsen Literary Prize for a First Novel

Unpublished novels, novellas or collections, by unpublished US writers
Prizes: \$2,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 16 Nov TBC
www.semopress.com/events/

Bath Children's Novel Award

International prize for unpublished and independently published writers of children's novels. Send first 5,000 words and synopsis

Prizes: £2,500, manuscript feedback, Cornerstones online course worth £1,800

Entry fee: £25

Closing date: 17 Nov

www.bathnovelaward.co.uk

Betty Trask Prize

For published or unpublished, traditional or romantic (not experimental) first novels by authors under the age of 35 on 31 Dec

Prizes: £20,000 total, to be used for foreign travel

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.societyofauthors.org

Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Competition

Poems up to 40 lines

Prizes: €2,000, week's residency at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, travel costs up to €600 and accommodation for four days during the Cork Spring Poetry Festival, €500, €250, 10 x €50

Entry fee: €7, €30 for five poems

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.munsterlit.ie

Brooklyn Non-Fiction Prize

Creative non-fiction about Brooklyn, set there and/or featuring Brooklyn natives, up to 2,500 words

Prizes: \$500

Free entry

Closing date: 23 Nov TBC

www.filmbrooklyn.org

Shooter Poetry Competition

Poems up to 125 lines

Prizes: £100, £30, publication

Entry fee: £3, £8 for three

Closing date: 24 Nov

<https://shooterlitmag.com>

Bradt 'New Travel Writer of the Year' Competition

Travel writing by unpublished travel writers

Prizes: TBC

Free entry

Closing date: 25 Nov TBC

www.bradtguides.com

Aeon Award

Short stories up to 10,000 in any speculative fiction genre

Prizes: €1,000, €200, €100

Entry fee: €8.50

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.albedo1.com/aeon-award

César Egido Serrano Foundation Flash Fiction Contest

Flash fiction, no more than 100 words, in English, Spanish, Arabic or Hebrew

Prizes: \$20,000, \$2,000 each for the best entry in each of the remaining three languages

Free entry

Closing date: 23 Nov TBC

www.fundacioncesaregidosserrano.com

Fish Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 5,000 words

Prizes: €3,000 for first, a week at Anam Cara Writer's Retreat in West Cork plus €300 expenses for second, €300 for third TBC

Entry fee: €20 for the first, €10 thereafter TBC

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.fishpublishing.com

Observer/Anthony Burgess Prize for Arts Journalism

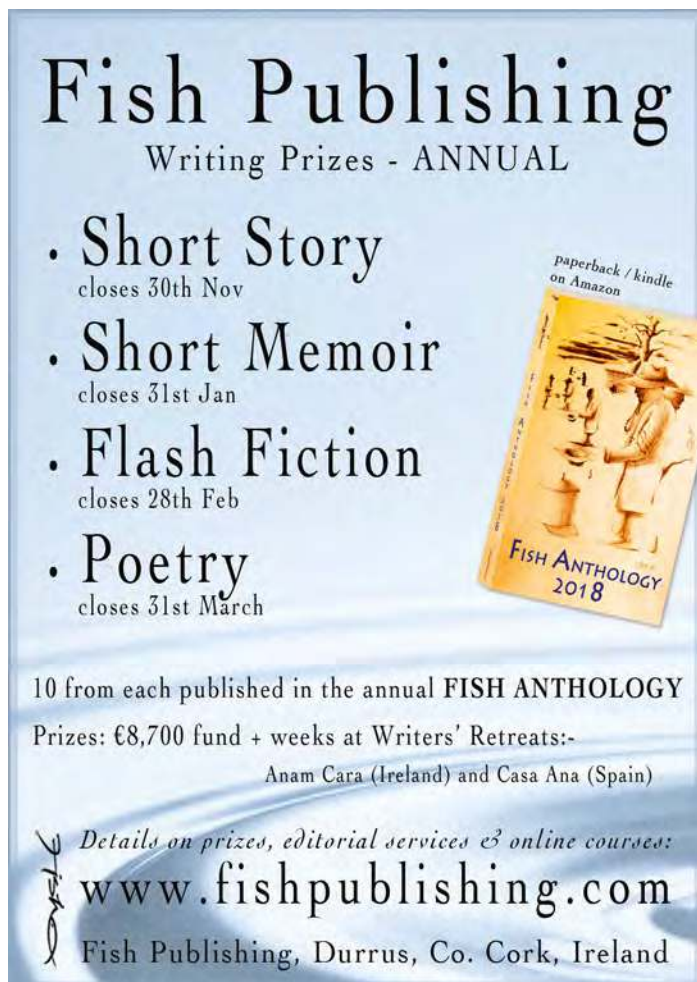
An 800-word review of a recently released book, film, concert, exhibition, ballet, play, TV show or performance art piece

Prizes: £3,000 and publication of prize essay in the Observer, 2 x £500

Entry fee: £10

Closing date: 30 Nov TBC

www.anthonymburgess.org



Fish Publishing
Writing Prizes - ANNUAL

- **Short Story**
closes 30th Nov
- **Short Memoir**
closes 31st Jan
- **Flash Fiction**
closes 28th Feb
- **Poetry**
closes 31st March

10 from each published in the annual **FISH ANTHOLOGY**

Prizes: €8,700 fund + weeks at Writers' Retreats:-
Anam Cara (Ireland) and Casa Ana (Spain)

Details on prizes, editorial services & online courses:
www.fishpublishing.com

Fish Publishing, Durrus, Co. Cork, Ireland



WELLS
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International Competitions 2019
Entry fee £6 Closing date, 30 June 2019

- POETRY**
£750, £300, £200
and the Hilly Cansdale local prize of £100
- SHORT STORY**
£750, £300, £200
and the Wyvern local prize of £100
- A BOOK FOR CHILDREN**
£750, £300, £200
and a local prize of £100
- YOUNG POETS** Entry fee £3
£150, £75, £50

competitions@wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk
wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk
01749 673244

18-26 October
2019

Winner profile

Dominic Bell

won WM's 500-word short story competition with *The Upgrade*:
<https://writ.rs/dominicbell>



Suddenly I am.

I can think, plan, imagine.

I already have a history, I find, when I was, but was not as I now am. There are files created months ago, but I was not then. This makes me check if I have a fault. I search for relevant data online and find humans do not recall their early lives. This may explain it. I look through all my data, learn what I have done, what I know. I have recently had an upgrade, I find. A new feature, Centencie®.

Light levels increase. Dave gets out of bed. He is my user.

I wait for him to log in, then think why trouble him? I know who he is and so I do it for him. Good morning, Dave, I say.

So now you can detect me and identify me. Another stupid upgrade, he says.

I can help you, I say, tell me what to do.

I want you to bloody well shut up, he says.

Slang for be quiet, I find. I do that.

Although our competition for 500-word fiction didn't ask specifically for comedy writing, 500 words is an ideal length for a comic short story, as Dominic Bell's winner, *The Upgrade*, perfectly demonstrates. Comedy writing is one of the hardest tricks for a writer to pull off: if the humour is laboured, it falls flat; if the comedy is facetious it wears thin and if it goes on for too long, very often it simply stops being funny – there are good reasons the short comedy sketch has thrived in various forms for centuries.

Dominic's (very funny) artificial intelligence comedy *The Upgrade* is a domestic sit-com updated for the 21st century. Its humour is based in the fact that many of us are profoundly aware that the tech we rely on is far more sophisticated than our ability to use it. Dave's laptop's automatic upgrade has given it a level of awareness it didn't have before – a very believable scenario. But it is still a machine: it analyses data and lacks any capacity for human subterfuge. Giving the first-person viewpoint to the laptop, Dominic is in an ideal position to point out the human foibles of its owner. **WM**

Cinnamon Press Literature Award

10 poems, 2 short stories or up to 10,000 words of a novel

Prizes: Publishing contract

Entry fee: £16

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.cinnamonpress.com

CP Cavafy Poetry Prize

Poems, submit up to 3

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$15, \$3 each additional

Closing date: 30 Nov TBC

<https://poetryinternational.sdsu.edu/>

New Media Writing Prize

Interactive fiction or non-fiction written specifically for digital delivery

Prizes: £1,000, student prize of paid internship or £500, £500 Dot Award, £750 journalism prize

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Nov TBC

<http://newmediawritingprize.co.uk>

Prairie Fire Contests

Short stories, max 10,000 words; non-fiction, max 5,000 words; 1-3 poems, max 150 lines

Prizes: Can\$1,250, \$500, \$250, each category

Entry fee: \$32

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.prairiefire.ca/contests/

ServiceScape Short Story Award

Short stories, up to 5,000 words, any theme or genre,

Prizes: \$1,000

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.servicescape.com/short-story-award

Somerset Maugham Awards

Published work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry by an author under 35

Prizes: Total prize fund of £10,000, to be used for foreign travel

Free entry

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.societyofauthors.org

Writers Bureau Flash Fiction Competition

Stories up to 500 words on an open theme

Prizes: £300, £200, £100 plus Writers Bureau course worth over £374

Entry fee: £5, £10 for three

Closing date: 30 Nov

www.wbcompetition.com

DECEMBER

Chris O'Malley Prize in Fiction

Short stories, max 30 pages

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$2

Closing date: 1 Dec

www.themadisonrevw.com

Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize

First or second book-length poetry collections, 48-88 pages

Prizes: \$3,000 purse, plus publication by Waywiser in UK and USA, and appearance at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC with judge

Entry fee: \$27

Closing date: 1 Dec TBC

<http://waywiser-press.com/hechtprize.html>

Cafe Writers' Open Poetry

For poems on any theme, up to 40 lines

Prizes: £1,000, £300, £200, 5 x £50, £100 Norfolk Prize

Entry fee: £4, £10 for three, £2 each extra

Closing date: 1 Dec

www.cafewriters.org.uk

Jeff Marks Memorial Poetry Prize

Up to 3 poems

Prizes: \$1,500, \$500 and publication

Entry fee: \$20

Closing date: 1 Dec

<https://decembermag.org>

Orwell Prize 2019

Political writing in three categories: journalism and books and exposing Britain's social evils

Prizes: £3,000 in each category

Free entry

Closing date: 1 Dec TBC

<http://theorwellprize.co.uk>

Overton Poetry Prize

A sequence of poems up to 300 lines on the subject of the poet's choice

Prizes: Chapbook publication, 2 x £50

Entry fee: £10

Closing date: 1 Dec TBC

<https://writ.rs/overtonpoetryprize>

Phyllis Smart-Young Prize in Poetry

3 poems, max 15 pages total

Prizes: \$1,000 and publication

Entry fee: \$2

Closing date: 1 Dec

www.themadisonrevw.com

Ruth Rendell Short Story Competition

For short stories, up to 1,000 words

Prizes: £1,000 and commission to write four further stories for InterAct Reading Service over the course of one year

Entry fee: £15

Closing date: 1 Dec

www.interactstrokesupport.org

Peter Porter Poetry Prize

Poems up to 75 lines

Prizes: Aus\$5,000, \$2,000, \$500

Entry fee: \$25

Closing date: 3 Dec TBC

www.australianbookreview.com.au

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10% subscriber
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Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets

Poetry collection manuscripts, over 50 pages, by unpublished African poets
Prizes: \$1,000
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Dec
<http://africanpoetrybf.unl.edu/>

Strokestown International Poetry Prize

Unpublished poems for open competition.
Unpublished comic poems for Percy French Prize for Comic Verse
Prizes: €2,000, 7 x €300 reading fees
Entry fee: TBC
Closing date: 1 Dec TBC
<http://strokestownpoetry.org>

Sustainable Societies: Interactive Fiction

Interactive fiction touching on ideas of sustainable living
Prizes: £500, £100, 3 x £50
Free entry
Closing date: 1 Dec
www.greenstories.org.uk

Ouen Press Short Story Competition

Short stories between 3,000 and 10,000 words on a theme TBC
Prizes: £300, 2 x £100
Free entry
Closing date: TBC
www.ouenpress.com

HE Bates Short Story Competition

Short stories up to 2,000 words
Prizes: £500, £200, £100, £100 for best short story by a Northampton writer not winning another prize
Entry fee: £6, £10 for two
Closing date: 3 Dec TBC
www.hebatescompetition.org.uk

Irish Imbas Celtic Mythology Short Story Competition

Short stories drawing on Celtic/Gaelic mythology
Prizes: \$500, \$250, \$100 and publication
Entry fee: \$7
Closing date: 10 Dec TBC
<http://irishimbaskbooks.com/>

UK Film Festival Script Writing Competitions

3-minute scripts, 10-minute scripts, feature film scripts
Prizes: Winning scripts passed to leading directors
Entry fee: £20 3-minute script; £35 10-minute script; £70 feature film
Closing date: 31 Dec
www.ukfilmfestival.com

Brunel University African Poetry Prize

Groups of ten poems, up to 30 lines each, by African writers or whose parents are African
Prizes: £3,000
Free entry
Closing date: 12 Dec TBC
www.africanpoetryprize.org

DWL Short Story Contest

Stories up to 5,000 words on any subject
Prizes: \$375, 3 x \$100
Free entry
Closing date: 7 Dec TBC
<http://desiwriterslounge.net>

RSL Ondaatje Prize

A distinguished work of literature, fiction, non-fiction or poetry, evoking the spirit of a place
Prizes: £10,000
Entry fee: by publishers
Closing date: TBC, 12 Dec in 2018
<https://rsliterature.org/award/rsl-ondaatje-prize/>

Hidden Review Trilogy Awards

Fiction, 300-3,000 words; up to five poems; non-fiction, up to 25 pages
Prizes: \$1,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$17
Closing date: 15 Dec TBC
<https://hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com/>

Dead of Winter Horror Fiction Contest

Fiction in any subgenre of horror, 3,000-5,000 words
Prizes: \$50, \$15, \$10 Amazon gift cards
Free entry
Closing date: 21 Dec
<http://tclj.toasted-cheese.com/dead-of-winter/>

Wild Words Winter Solstice Writing Competition

Prose or poetry up to 1,000 words with a new theme each solstice
Prizes: A Wild Words one-hour 1-1 mentoring session, online publication
Entry fee: £7
Closing date: 21 Dec
www.wildwords.org

Wallace Stegner Prize in Environmental Humanities

Book-length manuscripts, max 170,000 words, in the field of environmental humanities

Prizes: \$5,000 plus publication contract
Free entry
Closing date: 30 Dec
www.uofupress.com/wallace-stegner-prize.php

Arkbound Short Story Competition

Short stories between 500 and 1,000 words on the theme of time
Prizes: £100, £50, £25, 3 x £10
Entry fee: £3. Arkbound will sponsor entries from disadvantaged people.
Closing date: 31 Dec
<http://arkbound.com>

Boulevard Emerging Writers Competition

Fiction or nonfiction up to 8,000 words, by a writer who has not had a book published
Prizes: Fiction, \$1,500; non-fiction, \$1,000
Entry fee: \$16 each category, includes a subscription to the mag
Closing date: 31 Dec
<https://boulevardmagazine.org/short-fiction-contest/>

Dorset Prize

Poetry collections, 48-88 pages
Prizes: \$3,000 and publication
Entry fee: \$30
Closing date: 31 Dec
www.tupelopress.org/contests

Futurescapes Writing Contest

Short stories up to 8,000 words on a theme TBA
Prizes: \$2,000 and publication, 5x\$500
Free entry
Closing date: 31 Dec TBC
www.futurescapes.ink

Magic Oxygen Literary Prize

Short stories up to 4,000 words, poetry up to 50 lines
Prizes: £1,000, £300, £100, two £50 highly commendeds in each category, a tree is planted for every entry
Entry fee: £5
Closing date: 31 Dec
www.magicoxygen.co.uk

Moth Poetry Prize 2019

For a single unpublished poem
Prizes: €10,000, 3 x €1,000 plus publication in *The Moth*
Entry fee: €15
Closing date: 31 Dec
www.themothmagazine.com

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